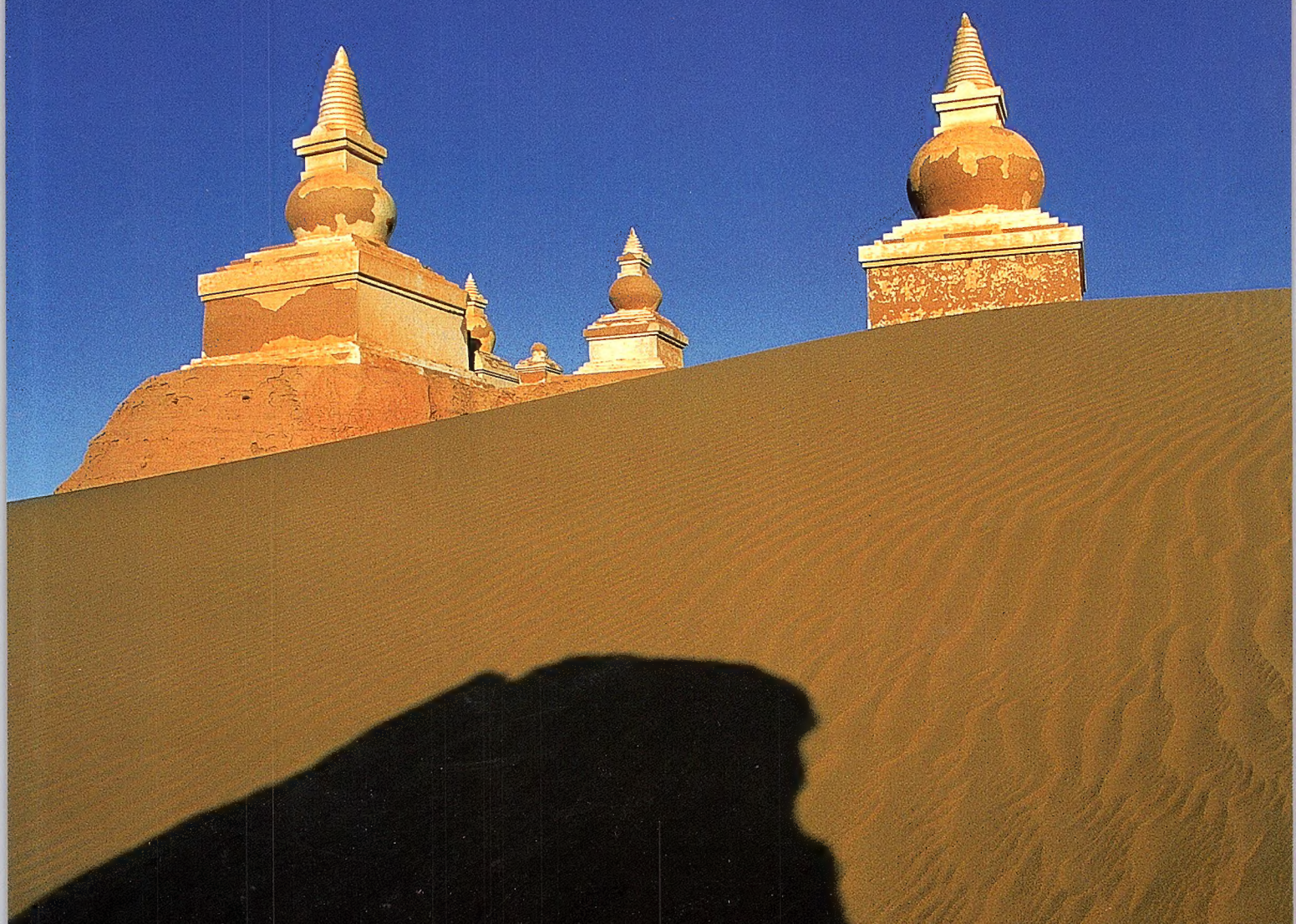


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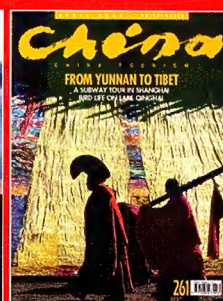
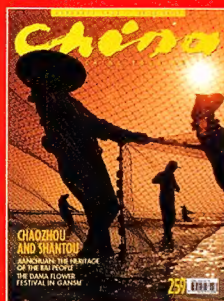
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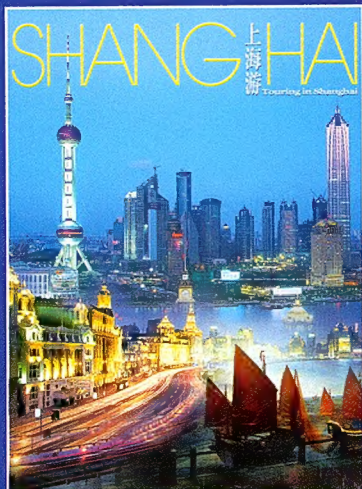
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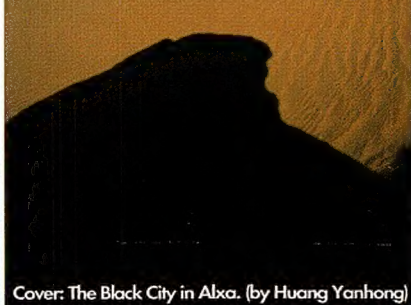
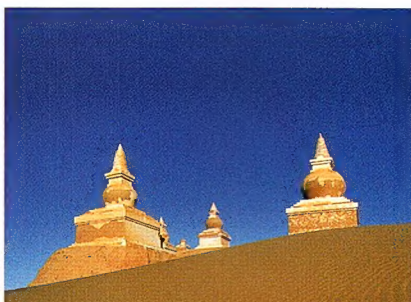
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Photos & article by Huang Yanhong

The Alxa League is the least known place in North China's Inner Mongolia. Still, three regions in the league, the Alxa Right and Left banners, and Ejin Banner, offer a wealth of travel resources. You may see a soul-stirring rock valley or forest in the Right Banner; or find yourself surrounded by historic ruins in the Left Banner. If you visit the Ejin Banner in winter, you will even be captivated by the stunning yet poetic view created by the countless fallen leaves of the poplar tree. It's also great fun to drive a dune buggy around in the Tengger Desert.

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- 40 Reminiscence in Tai O

Photos & article by Dianna Lau

Tourists looking for something different in such a commercialised city as Hong Kong will not be disappointed by this fishing village — Tai O. In this small area on Lantau Island, visitors will find numerous historical buildings reflecting the interesting local culture. But most importantly, one may feel the close-knit relationships between community members and the strong passion which the people have for their hometown, something seldom found in a large metropolis.

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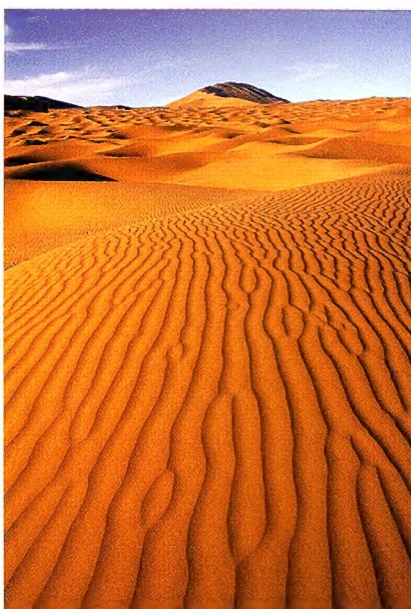
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Photos by Zheng Ligang Article by Zheng Ligang and Li Wu

The route from South Tibet to the East and North Tibet plateau is known to be teeming with Chinese caterpillar fungi, a precious kind of Chinese medicine. Thanks to this, people who previously had lived in simple tranquillity have now become greedy. Not only do they search everywhere for the worm-weed, but they are also destroying the expansive grassland which feeds their livestock.

Customs

58 The Resplendent Flower-Waist Dais

Photos by Shao Zibo and Liu Jianhua Article by Shen Zhi

As the largest ethnic group in Yunnan, the Dais are most impressive for the colourful clothing and accessories worn by their female members. The flower-waist Dais are most representative of this phenomenon. Every day, a flower-waist Dai woman piles her hair into a bun over which she wears a bamboo hat. She dresses in a vibrant outfit adorned with belts and other items woven for her by her sweetheart, to go to work in the fields.

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Publisher: HK CHINA TOURISM PRESS

24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 2561 8001 Fax: (852) 2561 8057 2561 8196

Editorial Dept., Business Dept., Advertising Dept., Sales Dept. Tel: (852) 2561 8001

China Tourism Photo Library Tel: (852) 2561 8001

E-mail: English Editorial Dept: edite@hkctp.com.hk

Advertising Dept: ad@hkctp.com.hk

Sales & Marketing Dept: mktg@hkctp.com.hk

Photo Library: plchina@navigators.com

Hong Kong China Tourism Ltd. (Licence No. 351850) Tel: (852) 2516 9228

Printer: C & C Offset Printing Co. Ltd.

C & C Building, 36 Ting Lai Road, Tai Po, N.T. Tel: (852) 2666 4988

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FROM THE EDITOR

SEEING THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND

Once again, concerns about the environment come into play in many of the articles in this issue. This month's Feature Story follows our correspondent on a journey to the Alxa League, in western Inner Mongolia of China. While the Gobi Desert here holds many fascinating sights and bewitching oases, desertification is an ongoing problem. Even Japan is beginning to feel its effects as sand is carried there on ocean winds. A delegation of Japanese committed to keeping deserts from expanding beyond their boundaries makes their way to the Gobi to see if they can help the situation. Conversely, one of the largest poplar forests on earth is also found in Alxa. Together, sand and autumn leaves turn the area a bright golden colour.

Meanwhile, the craze for the rare caterpillar fungus, one of three highly-prized Chinese medicinal products, is destroying the grasslands of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Because of the exorbitant prices it fetches, local residents are neglecting their usual livelihoods in favour of finding and digging up the unusual plant/worm by any means possible. While some have learned the painful lessons of such rampant destruction, there seems to be little hope of combatting the mad rush for instant wealth.

Balancing out this month's offering are more celebratory stories, including the colourful Flower-Waist Dai ethnic group, a traditional Tanka wedding and the beauty of Taihu Lake. We will always have crises and triumphs, but it is important that when we view our world, we give back as much as we have taken from it. If possible, even more.

Photo by Huang Yanhong

Shaanxi Builds Geological Park

A national geological park of yellow earth to be used for scientific research and educational purposes is currently under construction in Heimugou of Luochuan County in northwest China's Shaanxi Province. The 5.9-square-kilometre park on China's Loess Plateau is home to a variety of yellow earth terrain.

Geologists believe that studying the yellow earth strata could reveal climatic, environmental and botanical changes in the Loess Plateau over the past 2.5 million years. Covering 640,000 square kilometres in six provinces, the Loess Plateau is an unique landscape of the Central and Northwestern China.



Film City to Be Built in Panyu

Funded by a Hong Kong businessman investing over 80 million yuan (about US\$10 million), construction of a film city will begin in the Panyu District of Guangzhou this coming August. This will be the second film city located in Guangdong Province, the other being in Nanhai. The Panyu film city will spread over 5,000 square metres, and the project is scheduled for completion next year. Realistically recreated historical spots will be included in the city as a backdrop for films or TV programmes.

Tibet to Improve Rural Transportation

The Tibet Autonomous Region plans to spend about 3 billion yuan (about US\$361 million) to improve transportation facilities and construct highways in its rural areas. By the end of 2002, rural people in 60 villages and 20 townships will have benefited from this project, which will better connect them with the outside world.

During the 10th Five-Year Plan period (2001-2005), the region will spend a total of 12 billion yuan (about US\$1.45 billion) on 51 highway construction and technology projects, with the aim of opening roads and highways across 80 percent of the counties and townships in Tibet.

Last year, the region invested 1.81 billion yuan (US\$218 million) in rural road construction in over 100 villages, increasing its rural road length by 800 kilometres. At the same time, part of the investment was used to reconstruct many national and inter-provincial highways in the region. Though the number of roads in Tibetan rural areas is still low, local transportation officials have promised to increase road length as well as improve road standards.



Yongle Canon to be Digitalised

In a mere two years, the National Library of China (NLC) plans to digitalise the *Yongle Dadian* (*Yongle Canon* or *Yongle Encyclopedia*), the world's earliest and largest encyclopedia, which was compiled in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

The *Yongle Dadian* contained 22,877 volumes in 11,095 books. Nearly 3.7 billion Chinese characters were listed in order of their rhymes, and all relevant historical and literary documents from the Pre-Qin period (before 221 B.C.) to the Ming Dynasty were listed under each character. As most of the *Yongle Dadian* was destroyed during various invasions by foreign powers, it is estimated that only about 400 of its books remain in the world, in eight countries and regions. The NLC now houses 221 of the books, 60 of which are currently stored in Taiwan.

The canon will be put onto CD ROM, and its contents and images will be available on the Internet. Databases and indexes will be included to enable readers to search for information.

Established in 1909 in Zhongguancun in the Haidian District of Beijing, the NLC has a rich collection of 22 million-plus volumes, ranking fifth among the great libraries of the world. Interested parties can visit its website at: <http://www.nlc.gov.cn>.

Winged Creatures Make Home in Liaoning

Now that polluting factories have been moved away and the environment has improved in recent years, flocks of birds, including cranes, geese and other waterfowl, have settled at three reservoirs in Chaoyang in northeast China's Liaoning Province. About 10,000 wild swans have also made their home across this 7,000-square-metre area, creating a wonderful scene that has attracted many curious tourists.

Conghua, a Garden City by 2004

To meet the State's environmental protection requirements, Conghua, a suburban city of Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, will spend more than 100 million yuan (US\$12 million) to build 11 ecological parks in the next few years. It is expected that by the year 2004, after the parks are complete, Conghua's forested areas will cover more than 420 hectares, with 19.26 square metres per capita of greenery. Additionally, all the new parks will be free of charge.

Hong Kong Builds Teddy Bear Kingdom

In mid-April, New World Development Limited and Teddy Bear Kingdom (HK) Limited, a joint venture of several Japanese and Hong Kong companies, reached an agreement to lease an area of 70,000 square feet at the Palace Mall in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong, where they plan to build an indoor park.

With an investment of US\$12 million, the park, to be known as Teddy Bear Kingdom, will feature a huge collection of teddy bears. The kingdom will also include forests, a sea, shops, restaurants, museums, schools and playgrounds, with the aim of providing entertainment for tourists of various ages from home and abroad.

China's Capital City to Build Second Airport

Growing public concern about whether the Beijing Capital Airport can deal with the increasing influx of passengers, especially ahead of the 2008 Olympics, has resulted in plans for a second airport. Meanwhile, a new terminal has already been planned for the existing international airport.

Although the Beijing airport company has formed a committee to choose the best site for a second airport in the nation's capital, existing airport facilities will have to be used to their full capacity before construction of a second airport will begin. A new runway and terminal at the current airport are due to open in 2007.

The current Beijing Capital Airport was designed according to the predicted aviation market demands of 2005, giving it the capacity to handle a flow of 35 million passengers annually.



Dinosaur Museum to Be Built in Gansu

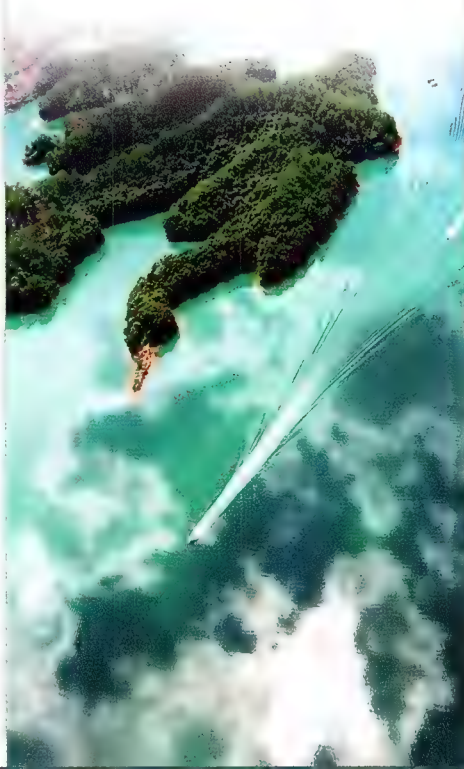
Construction of a dinosaur museum has started at the Liujiaxia Dinosaur Geological Park in northwest China's Gansu Province. The museum, which will occupy 6,000 square metres, will house fossils of dinosaur footprints, dinosaur bones found in Gansu, and Paleozoic fossils.

In 1999, the dinosaur footprints, covering a total area of 736 square metres and thought to be the largest area of such prints yet found in the world, were excavated in the region. The prints were then separated into 44 groups under nine categories.

The 15-square-kilometre, state-level geological park was completed in 2001 at a cost of 96 million yuan. The park plays a key role in facilitating further excavations and promoting popular science.

Asia's Largest Aquatic Museum in Hubei

A museum of aquatic resources, covering 5,000 square metres, will be constructed in Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei Province, in this year. To be based on five aquariums in the Wuhan Institute of Hydrobiology, a subsidiary of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the museum will boast a wide variety of freshwater fish, algae and other marine life, and will be the largest of its kind. Visitors will also be able to see a specimen of the rare Chinese white dolphin on display in the museum.



China's First Sunflower Theme Park Opens

Guangzhou, China The first theme park of sunflower has opened in Panyu, a fast-developing district in Guangzhou in Southeast China's Guangdong Province. Occupying 1,000 *mu* (about 670,000 sq m), the park features more than one million sunflowers which can keep full bloom the whole year.

The park has introduced 18 kinds of sunflowers from Europe and Japan. Some species suitable for growing in sub-tropical climate have also been planted in the park. The grand Sunflower Park is a highlighted travel item in Panyu in 2002.

Fujian: Ideal Place for Excursions

Fujian East China's Fujian is a province owning ample tourist resources. The Wuyi Mountain, as a famous World Heritage Site, boasts stunning natural landscapes in northwestern Fujian. It is among the first group of scenic areas under the protection of the country as announced by the State Council.

Another site which is in the process of applying for the entrance of the World Heritage Site is the earthen houses of the Hakka people. An unique residential architecture of the world, the earthen houses are being called "amazing antique castles of the Orient", which reflect the wisdom of the Hakka people.

Besides, the three coastal cities in Fujian are also ideal tourist resorts. Xiamen, known as "a garden of the sea", has mild climate around the year. The Haicang Bridge and Huandao Road built in these years have become new scenic spots in this special economic zone. As the setting point of the "Silk Road on the sea", Quanzhou is the hometown of many Taiwanese. Many religions buildings, full of Arabian characteristics, have created a special view in this southern Fujian city. Fuzhou, the capital city of Fujian, also boasts rich history and culture. It is where tourists can taste the best Fujian dishes.

Fujian boasts affluent cultural landscapes, including the Mazu (also known as Tian Hou, or the Goddess of the Sea) culture, Hui'an women spirit, and tea culture. Other scenic spots include the Sanming Ecology Tourist Area, Dajin Lake in Taining, Guanzhi Mountain in Liancheng County, Longyan City, "Clay Warriors On the Sea" in Zhangpu, Mount Tailao and Mount Huanggang Ecology Tourist Area.



Embracing Chinese History in Humen
Humen, Guangdong Humen, a town in Dongguan, Guangdong Province, has become a popular tourist destination of weekend tours of Hong Kong people. The town is highly accessible in transportation and is a rendezvous of all kinds of fashion in China. By visiting the Lin Tse-tsu Memorial Hall and Opium War Museum, tourists can obtain rich information about the contemporary history of Hong Kong and Guangdong.

Admission fee: 10 yuan/adult, half-concession for children

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(Information by Liang Juqiao)

First Abacus Museum in China Opens

Shanxi China's first abacus museum has opened in Qixian County of North China's Shanxi Province. The 600-plus abaci are all collected by a local resident called Zhou Baolin. A spectacular four-storey pavilion with 668 abaci, copying the ancient Danfengge Pavilion, has also been built in Qixian County.

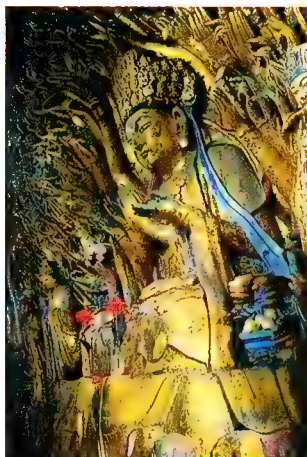
The collection contains various standards, shapes, materials and lengths. For instance, seven-bead models of two-up, five-down; five-bead models of one-up, four-down; and nine-bead models, one-up, three-middle and five-down. They were made in shapes from square, octagon, trapezia, triangle to double-fish, with materials including gold, silver, copper, iron, bone, jade, agate and crystal. Their lengths range from six metres to one centimeter with the longest one allowing 12 people to work together and the smallest a decoration.

Elite collection contains an ivory seven-shift abacus with seven rhombic beads, two-up and five-down from the Ming Dynasty, a five-shift abacus with copper rods and red agate beads, one-up and four-down, and abaci once used by Emperor Qianlong and Empress Cixi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The 11-shift abacus used by Emperor Qianlong caps the collection with a gold frame, more than 20 colourful gems and 77 china beads outlined with various bright flower designs.

Abaci had appeared in many countries, but only survived in China. Their history can be retrieved to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), based on the earliest record found in an arithmetic book from that period. However, the finding of 86 clay beads from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1,000-771 B.C.), identified as those used for calculation, dates the origin of the abacus to at least 2,700 years ago. Nowadays abaci serve as a complement to computers in China's finance and accounting sectors.

Guanyin Statue of Dazu Rock Carvings Refurbished

Chongqing The Dazu Rock Carvings located in Chongqing have been listed as a World Heritage Site in 1999. Recently, there is a grand refurbishment for the Thousand-hand Guanyin statue situated on the Mount Baoding. It is 300 years after the statue was first refurbished in the Qing Dynasty (1688-1911). The process will last for about three years.



The Thousand-hand Guanyin statue is 7.7 metres in height and 12.5 metres in width. There are 1,007 hands built around its body. Since an eye was carved on each hand, the statue is also called "Thousand-hand and Thousand-eye Guanyin" (in Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva). Carved more than 800 years ago on a rocky wall of about 10 metres, the statue covers an area of 88 square metres.

According to the Dazu Rock Carvings Art Museum, the refurbishment can be divided into four steps. First, water will be spread on the rocky wall. This helps experts to understand the level of destruction by weathering of the statue, as well as how much gold powder will fall after that. Then, a team will be formed to design the refurbishment plan. The third stage is to start the repairing for the destroyed part of the statue. The last procedure will be to add gold leaf on the statue.

The Dazu Rock Carvings were first built in early Tang Dynasty. It is among the most exquisite rock carving art pieces in China.

Lhasa — Tibet's Black-necked Cranes Thrive

Tibet The most recent survey of Tibet's black-necked crane population reveals an increase of 290 birds since the 1992 survey, bringing the total amount of the rare species to 4,200. According to an official from the Tibet Plateau Biological Research Institute, black-necked cranes living in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region account for 75 percent of the world total which numbers 6,000. The crane can also be seen in the remote areas of Qinghai, Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou provinces.

Investigations by Chinese scientists have tracked two migration routes followed by the black-necked cranes, both of which pass through the wetland of Tibet. They have also set up two reserves in Tibet dedicated to the breeding and study of the species to help determine the ideal climate and living conditions for black-necked cranes.

Huangshan Develops Ancient Sites

Anhui Early this year, the construction of the Yuliang Scenic Area in Shexian County, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) City in East China's Anhui Province, has started. Invested with 20 million yuan by the Shexian County Famous City Relics and Scenic Areas Development Limited, the scenic area will restore the previous looking of an ancient commercial port built in the Ming and Qing dynasties in Anhui, as well as renovate the Xin'an Ancient Road, Baiyun Monastery, Zhonghu Temple, Ziyang Villa, King Yu Court, antique shops in Yuliang Old Street, and a museum.

The Yuliang Scenic Area stretches from the Taiping Bridge in the north to Ziyang Bridge in the south, including the Yuliang Ancient Village. Situated in southern suburb in the Shexian county city, the Yuliang Village boasts an ancient street and a dam built between the late Sui and early Tang dynasties. Built across the Lianjiang River, a tributary of the Xin'an River, the dam was erected with rocks and is 143-metre-long, 5-metre-high, and a base of 27-metre-wide. It is praised as the "Dujiangyan (a famous giant ancient irrigation system still functions in Sichuan) in South China".

Built in the Hongzhi era in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Taiping Bridge is 268-metre-long and 7.1-metre-wide. The largest ancient bridge in Anhui, it is a relic item under provincial protection. Located down the Yuliang Dam, the Ziyang Bridge was named after the Mount Ziyang. Established in the years of Wanli in Ming Dynasty, the reddish rocky bridge has nine holes, and is 140-metre-long, 10-metre-wide, and 14-metre-high. The bridge is now an unit under protection of the Shexian County.

New Museum Opens in Wangfujing Street

Beijing A museum featuring the cultural ruins of ancient human beings has recently opened in Wangfujing Street in Beijing. Located at the ground floor of the Oriental Plaza in the



busy street, the museum has showcased the living condition of human beings dated back nearly 25,000 years ago. The gallery covering 300-plus square metres showcases rock instruments like tablets, hammers, and plates unearthed in the current site of the museum. There are also instruments made of the bones of animals like cow, deer, ostrich, and fish by man more than 20,000 years ago.

Turbo Jet Launches Macao-Shenzhen Route

Macao/Shenzhen On March 10, Turbo Jet launched a new route going between Macao and Shenzhen. A free shuttle bus service is available in Shenzhen, connecting passengers between the ferry terminal and Airport which is merely a few minutes' ride. With the new service, travellers may now easily and conveniently travel between Macao and Shenzhen in an hour.

To Shenzhen (11:15; 15:00)

Regular fares:

Weekdays/weekends & holidays: \$291 (super class); \$191 (economy class).

Promotional fares:

Weekdays: \$253 (super class); \$151 (economy class).

Weekends & holidays: \$268 (super class); \$162 (economy class)

To Macao (9:30; 13:30)

Regular fares:

Weekdays/weekends & holidays: \$271 (super class); \$171 (economy class).

Promotional fares:

Weekdays: \$233 (super class); \$131 (economy class).

Weekends & holidays: \$248 (super class); \$142 (economy class).

Museum of Wild Bugs Opens

Shanghai A museum featuring wild insects has now opened for public close to the Oriental TV Tower in Pudong District in Shanghai. Covering over 30,000 square metres, it is raising more than 10,000 insects from 200-plus kinds. The museum has applied state-of-the-art technology to create a wild environment for the creatures, including fields, forests, marshes, valleys and deserts. Visitors can appreciate the bugs which are rarely seen in the urban city in the Butterfly Valley, Insect Corridor, Tropical Rainforest Experimental Zone, and the ?Cave, etc.

Singapore Simplifies Travel Visa Procedures

China Singapore In order to further boost the tourism, Singapore has simplified certain travel visa procedures last year. The time for approving the visa has been shortened to three days. The change will benefit the holders of HKDH, Macao SAR travel visa, and the Chinese passport. The new procedure is practised in two kinds of travel visa: individual visa (14 days) and group visa (14 days). Moreover, the requirement of a Singaporean guarantor has also been cancelled.

Singapore Consulate Hong Kong Office: 9/F, First Phase of Hoi Fu Centre, Admiralty, Hong Kong.

Office hours: Mon. — Fri. (10a.m.—12p.m.)

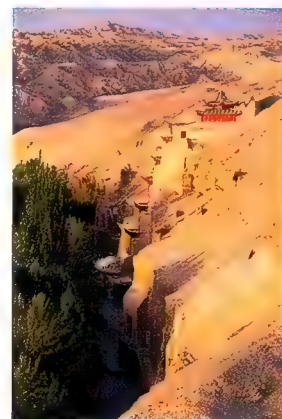
Tel: (852) 25272212

(Information by Liang Juqiao)



Lanzhou — China's Oldest Post Office Found

Gansu A 2,000-year-old letter that never reached its addressee has led to the discovery of China's oldest post office along the ancient Silk Road, not far from the famous Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes. The letter, which was written on a piece of silk, was found in the Xuanquanzhi Ruins in northwest Gansu Province and is, to date, the best-preserved personal letter dating from the



Han Dynasty (206 B.C.—220). In it, the author sends his good wishes from the frontier in the remote western region to a friend in inland China. After describing his harsh life on the frontier, he asks his friend to send him some goods by way of Dunhuang.

The Xuanquanzhi Ruins are located at an important part of the old Silk Road, where remains of beacon towers from the Han, Jin and Qing dynasties can be seen. The ruins were excavated over the years 1990-1992 and are considered one of the top ten finds of that decade. According to the many postal artifacts found there, Xuanquanzhi was a major outpost for the postal service, despatching deliveries and receiving guests more than 2,000 years ago.

Wuhan — Yangtze River Foldaway Map

Hubei A comprehensive, foldaway map of the Yangtze River was published in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, in April, making writer Lu Jiaxiong the first individual in China to fund, design and publish such a map. Seven years in the making, the map measures 2,280 cm in length and is 43 cm wide when fully opened.

Noting nearly every aspect of the river basin, including natural resources, population counts and transportation facilities to tourist sites, the map will also appear in English this coming autumn. At that time, 50,000 copies will be published in both Chinese and English.

Beijing-Ancient Fresco Tomb Discovery

Beijing A Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) era tomb recently found in Beijing's western suburbs contains rare, coloured fresco paintings commemorating the lives of the couple buried in it. The names of Zhao Li, a government official, and his wife appear in an inscription on the memorial tablet inside the tomb. According to experts, six brightly coloured paintings adorn the walls, depicting scene's from the couple's everyday life and their servants' activities as well as the twelve animals of the Chinese horoscope.



Happy Times on an *Ocean Liner*

While it is nothing new for me to board an ocean liner, I still get a tingle as I ascend the gangway. However, this was my first time to board one in Hong Kong. Usually, I would fly to other countries to take cruises. So, with suitcase in hand, I hailed a taxi to the ocean terminal at Tsim Sha Tsui.

My friends and I were going to sail on the Leo. My destination this time was Zhanjiang in China and Ha Long Bay in Viet Nam. Together with Yi Da and two others, we enjoyed the four-day-three-night voyage to our hearts' content.

My companions were really a good lot as we all loved to travel by boat. We had lot fun on board — swimming, lounging in a Jacuzzi, watching films and live performances, playing computer games, exercising, reading.... Although we were a group of four, we did not play mahjong at all. Three foreigners, however, could not resist the temptation and played even though they were one person short, which attracted a lot of attention.

We spent the happiest night singing karaoke. In fact, none of us was a great fan of singing, but the collection of songs available touched us deeply. To our surprise, a lot of familiar but long-forgotten songs played continuously. We followed along and sang, either solo or in chorus, bringing back the old days.

Of course, we enjoyed the food as well — the French cuisine of Maxim's, the Laksa at Lanhu, the buffet dinner, and the Western food on "Captain's Night" were all memorable.

In addition to the onboard fun, the places where we docked were also worth seeing. I had heard the name Zhanjiang long before, but I didn't realise it was so close (only two hours from

Writer: **Tu Xiaodie**


Born in Hong Kong and educated in the United States, the author has served as editor-in-chief for several magazines. In recent years she has devoted herself to writing about travel and her articles have appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines. Having published books about Singapore and Shenzhen, she is now preparing a series of guidebooks.

Hainan Island by boat). We made a sightseeing tour of the city and found it very similar to every big metropolis in China. The most unforgettable thing of all was the seafood lunch, which included abalone, rare fish, lobster and crab, surprising all of us who were used to "standard tour group" meals.

On the third day, we arrived at Ha Long Bay. Having toured the place before, Yi Da told us it was great to shuttle between the more than 1,000 small isles in the bay by motorboat. And he was right. We listened to the guide, a young girl, on the motorboat tell us the story about the formation of these isles. According to her, all these rocky islets were originally

pearls scattered in the sea by a heavenly god. They all have different, interesting shapes and many of them are still nameless.

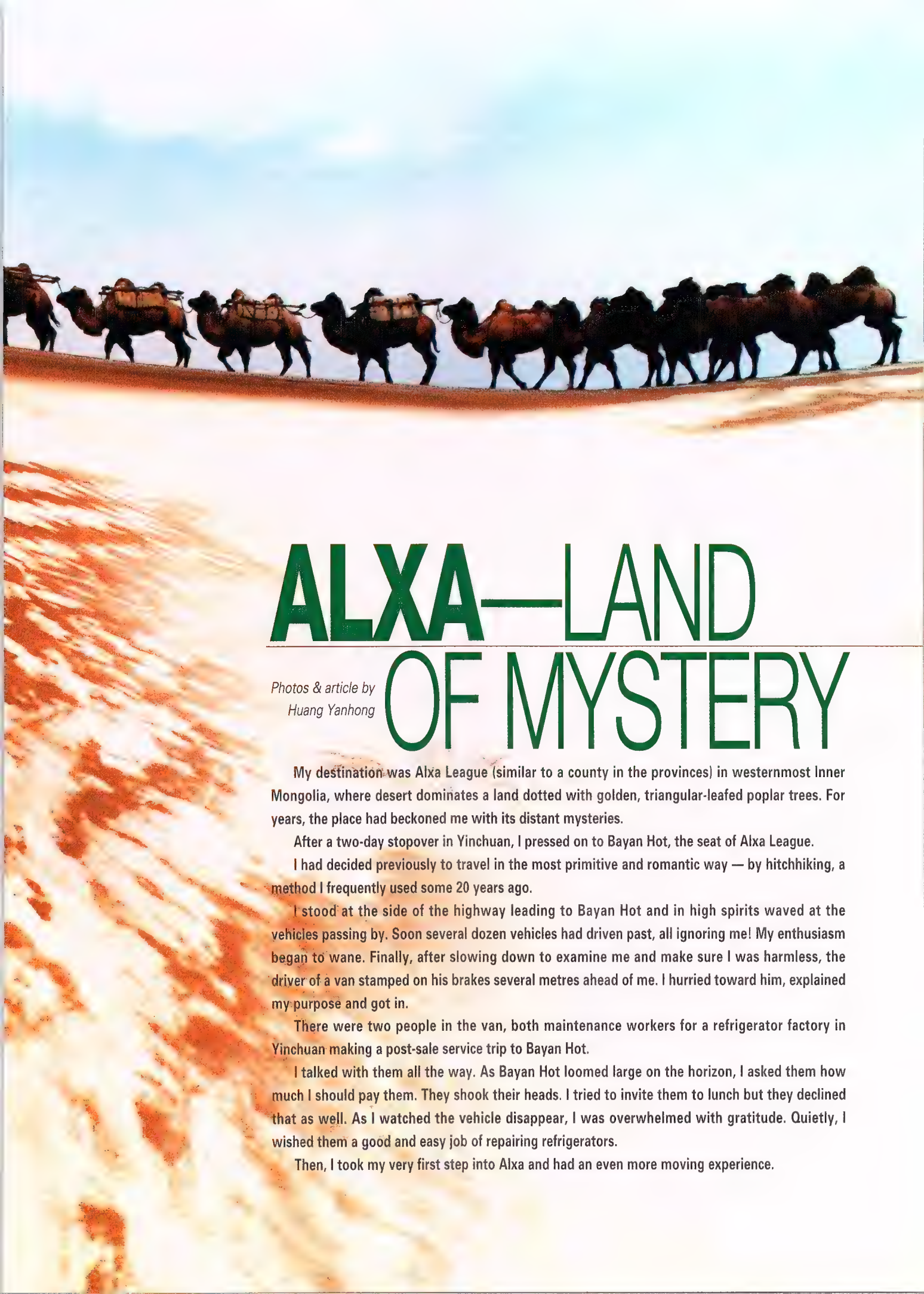
A rural fair near Ha Long Bay is another must for all visitors, because it features native products from Viet Nam. Compared with Hong Kong, the prices are quite low. However, we had to bargain with the shop or stall owners as they initially quoted very high prices for their merchandise. If we thought a price was too dear, we just pretended to leave. The owners tried everything to make us stay. Finally, they offered a lower price. If we thought that price was still too high, we pretended to leave again, and so on, until they reduced the price enough.

When the liner sailed back, we were lucky to get a room with a balcony. Through the window, we could see clearly the numerous rocky islets of Ha Long Bay. For more than half an hour they passed from view, one after another, as if bidding us a reluctant farewell. 

Translated by Li Zhenguo

FEATURE STORY





ALXA—LAND OF MYSTERY

*Photos & article by
Huang Yanhong*

My destination was Alxa League (similar to a county in the provinces) in westernmost Inner Mongolia, where desert dominates a land dotted with golden, triangular-leafed poplar trees. For years, the place had beckoned me with its distant mysteries.

After a two-day stopover in Yinchuan, I pressed on to Bayan Hot, the seat of Alxa League.

I had decided previously to travel in the most primitive and romantic way — by hitchhiking, a method I frequently used some 20 years ago.

I stood at the side of the highway leading to Bayan Hot and in high spirits waved at the vehicles passing by. Soon several dozen vehicles had driven past, all ignoring me! My enthusiasm began to wane. Finally, after slowing down to examine me and make sure I was harmless, the driver of a van stamped on his brakes several metres ahead of me. I hurried toward him, explained my purpose and got in.

There were two people in the van, both maintenance workers for a refrigerator factory in Yinchuan making a post-sale service trip to Bayan Hot.

I talked with them all the way. As Bayan Hot loomed large on the horizon, I asked them how much I should pay them. They shook their heads. I tried to invite them to lunch but they declined that as well. As I watched the vehicle disappear, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Quietly, I wished them a good and easy job of repairing refrigerators.

Then, I took my very first step into Alxa and had an even more moving experience.



1

THE ALXA LEFT BANNER

Sites to See:

Moon Lake — Suitable for leisurely exploration and photography. The 15-kilometre drive through the desert can be a little unnerving. Elderly travellers and those with heart trouble are advised to stay away.

The South Temple — Large and convenient to reach. The Helan Mountain Forest Park is a world of tranquillity.

The North Temple — A beautiful site with pleasantly cool weather in summer. Avoid visiting in flood season when it is inaccessible.

The Prince Palace and Yanfu Temple — Both in the city proper, with strong historical significance. Definitely worth seeing.

Suggested length of stay: 4 days

Reliable contacts:

Aoyun (Director, Tourism Bureau, Alxa Left Banner;

Tel: 483-8222525)

Xie Peng'an (Manager of Moon Lake Park; Tel: 483-8593124)

Moon Lake — A Unique Site of Water and Greenery in the Desert

While walking the streets of Bayan Hot, I asked a shop clerk what places were worth seeing. She said, without hesitation, "Moon Lake."

The lake is located in the Tengger Desert. "Tengger" means sky in Mongolian. Throughout the expansive sea of sand as infinite as the sky are over 250 lakes of varying sizes, sparkling like stars. Moon Lake is just one of these.

I called Hasbagen, a local photographer, and learned that he was going to take pictures at Moon Lake, so I followed along. An hour later, we were at the edge of the desert where we had to transfer to a four-wheel-drive, cross-country vehicle.

It was the first time I had been driven in a desert and I was somewhat on guard. The vehicle bumped and lurched left and right, pushing ever onward thanks to a powerful engine and the skilled driver. When ascending a sandy slope, he pressed hard on the





accelerator, changed gears, then depressed the accelerator again. Just as we charged to the top of the sand dune, he pressed down on the brake in timely fashion, quickly studied the terrain and then changed direction. Because the slope was steep, he could not simply drive down again, but had to back out and choose a different route.

Finally, Moon Lake lay before us. From high on a sand dune, I saw the typical south China scenery of water and greenery, but in the midst of a desert. On the limitless stretch of sand, an expanse of water appeared. Looking more closely, I noticed that the lake was shaped like a map of China. Moon Lake was so named by a Qing Dynasty princess.

During Emperor Kangxi's reign in the 17th century, Princess Daokexin married Abao, Prince of Alxa. Before she left her home in Beijing to be with

her new husband, the emperor and empress gave their daughter two swans that they had raised and trained to be emissaries.

Feeling homesick one day, the princess



Driving in the Desert at Night

Apart from being beautiful to behold, Moon Lake offered another kind of attraction.

Both Hasbagen and I were dumbfounded to see dune buggies dashing about in the desert.

The tour guide asked whether I was brave enough to ride in one. Unable to resist temptation, I got into a buggy and so did Hasbagen. But since neither of us had much experience with the sport, we decided not to drive. Rather we sat in the buggies and left our fates to the drivers.

Compared with the trip to Moon Lake, this driving experience was more exciting and far more breathtaking. The chassis of the buggies sit rather low, while just a cloth canopy covers the top. The wind howled and sand and dust rose up behind us. Wherever a buggy went, there was a dimly visible line of disturbed sand. When our dune buggy dashed up a slope, it tilted so much that I broke out in a cold sweat.

Even so, the driver was being rather gentle. On top of a sand dune, Hasbagen and I got out to take pictures. The three buggies, which had carried Hasbagen, our own driver and me dashed off, almost flying away like three swift arrows. The most fantastic part was watching them surging up from a low sand pit and curling up along the wall of the pit as if they were part of an acrobatic show. From a distance, they looked like beetles leaving curved tracks on the sand. We took dozens of pictures.

The drivers returned and asked us if we wanted to give it a try now that we had been driven around. Once again, I was overcome with excitement and decided to have a go. I sat in a dune buggy all by myself. After fastening the seat belt, I took off and began to enjoy the feeling of flying, rising and falling, over the sand. It was simple to operate, as all I had to control was the accelerator and brake. The main thing needed was lot of guts. Since it was my first time to drive like this, I did not attempt to hurdle any huge sand dunes for fear that I might land in the middle of a slope. So I stayed on the gentler hills. Although my performance was a far cry from the expertise and ease demonstrated by the professionals, I enjoyed myself immensely.

Hasbagen said that he would come again, too, to drive.

wrote a letter to her parents, which was to be conveyed to the palace in the capital by the two swans and their little baby. That night, the princess had a terrible dream in which the three swans lost their way in a strong wind. Totally exhausted, they collapsed in the Tengger Desert and turned into three lakes. Later, the princess went to the desert and found three such lakes. She named them Sun Lake, Moon Lake and White Cloud Lake, respectively.

Previous page: The Alxa Desert, the second largest desert in China, is composed of the Tengger Desert, Badain Jaran Desert and Ulan Buh Desert. (by Zuo Zhulin)

1. The drivers are driving at full speed in Tengger Desert. The racing cars look like beetles from afar.
2. While turning, the racing car is in a steep gradient. The driver must not only be skillful but also daring.
3. The racing car with a horsepower of 20 can easily climb the dunes.
4. As they whiz down the sandy slope, the cars fly as swiftly as the wind and flash like lightning.

THE ALXA LEFT BANNER

The Princess and the Roasted Sheep

Whole roasted sheep from Alxa is not only a famous dish of Inner Mongolia but is regarded as a delicacy throughout the country; that from the area of Moon Lake is considered best of all.

A cook told me that the cooking method originated in Alxa. When the princess arrived here from Beijing, she began to popularise the technique for roasting Peking duck. Soon, the recipe took hold and began to spread. I went to watch the entire process of roasting a whole sheep, which is similar to preparing roasted Peking duck. Firstly, a huge oven is needed. Charcoal is lit to warm up the walls of the brick-and-mud oven. Then, the fire is removed, the sheep is hung in the middle of the oven and the oven is closed up. The sheep bakes for six hours in just the warmth absorbed by the oven walls.

Having enjoyed ourselves the first half of the day, we were looking forward to a supper of roast mutton. Around dinner time, I was told that the sheep was done cooking. I hurried to the kitchen to see two men standing high above the opened oven, lifting out the sheep.

Meanwhile, in a huge Mongolian yurt, dozens of people waited in great anticipation. They watched as the cook quickly sliced up the perfectly roasted oily, red meat, without a single overdone spot, into small pieces. Just as with Peking duck, we first ate the skin, which was thin, crispy and delicious.

The whole roasted sheep drew all the diners together. There was talking, singing and drinking. Normally I don't drink, but at such a delicious feast, and urged on by beautiful Mongolian girls who kept singing the "Song of Inviting You to Drink", I felt I ought to join in. So, like everyone else, I ate huge chunks of mutton and drank from the big bowls. What an evening!

Black Mud under the Sand — A Heaven-sent Gift

Early next morning, Hasbagen and I went to shoot the sunrise. Over a span of 20 years, he has gone into the desert many times and taken hundreds of fantastic pictures.

The sand dune we approached was really beautiful. However, whenever I walk on sand, I often find it too soft and unstable. Each experience is rather unpleasant and this time was no exception. Though I was eager to climb to the top to watch the sunrise, the sand underfoot continually gave way, wearing me out. In the end, I failed to reach the summit. Fortunately, it was hazy and the sunrise was not spectacular. Otherwise, I would have been extremely annoyed.

Conversely, walking along the foot of the dune was very agreeable. We went to a lake where birds that had spent the night in the reed grove were just waking. Flocks of wild ducks were swimming in the company of some Mandarin ducks. Hasbagen said that in





several days' time, the swans would arrive. He used to photograph big flocks of swans here.

At noon I was invited to go swimming. I pondered the suggestion and finally decided against it. Although the sun was warm and the day was fine, it was mid-October after all. I saw several young people swimming and also had a good look at the sandy beach. Strangely, the beach, some 1,000 metres long and 100 metres wide, was an earthy yellow on the surface, but this masked a layer of black mud over ten metres thick. If you kick the sand hard enough, the black mud is exposed. Experts who have studied the place say the mud is of better quality than that of the Dead Sea in Israel, which makes it an ideal, natural mud-bathing site.

A mud-based health sanatorium is currently being constructed by the lake. Soon, the place will be much busier.

1. There are many lakes like this in the Tengger Desert.
2. The recipe for roasting Peking duck recommended by the princess quickly became popular.
3. When evening comes, tourists and Mongolian girls attend the evening party around a campfire.
4. Tourists are welcomed by the Mongolians.
5. Mongolian tents have been set up in the desert close to Moon Lake.
6. Swimming at Black Sand Beach.

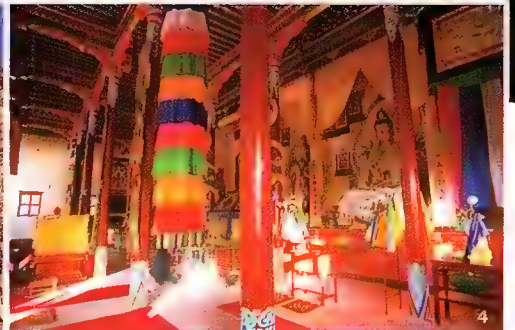
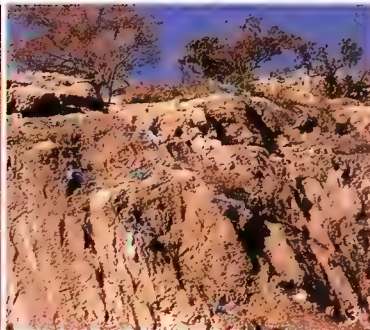
Profile: Song Jun, the Investor

The first time I met Song Jun, he was swimming and chatting with his staff. The local people were highly respectful of him for he was a main investor in the Alxa Left Banner. In his investment activities, he follows one principle — he will not take on projects that harm the environment. Apart from supporting tourism development projects at Moon Lake, he is primarily engaged in a project to cultivate a plant called desert cistanche. He told me that excessive digging of this traditional medicinal herb had destroyed the sagsaoul groves upon whose roots the desert cistanche survives. This in turn has led to the deterioration of the local ecology. So, three years ago, he invested in an artificial desert cistanche cultivation plantation of thousands of hectares.

He took me to see his plantation, where I visited several households specialising in growing the plant. In their gardens, the participants had succeeded in raising desert cistanche, also known as "ginseng of the desert", on the roots of sagsaoul plants. Their work not only helped stabilise the sand dunes, restore vegetation and improve the environment, but it also increased their incomes.



THE ALXA LEFT BANNER



The North Temple and Its Understanding Abbot

Bayan Hot, capital of Alxa League, is often described as the "little Beijing in the northern region".

The most typical structure here is the palace of the prince, an exact copy of the quadrangle-style houses in Beijing. It was built by the prince of Alxa to please the princess who had grown up in Beijing.

Yanfu Temple, separated from the Prince Palace by a wall, was built in 1742. The name of the temple was in the handwriting of Emperor Qianlong, who also gave the temple a tablet bearing its name in gold in four languages: Manchurian, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese.

Outside the city stands the North Temple, built in 1804. I wanted



cast its rays on the valley, giving vitality to the rocks and trees.

The South Temple — Reason for Pity

The road to the South Temple was much better than that to the North Temple — smooth sailing all the way. Unfortunately, though, I had arrived at the start of the “winter hibernation”; all the scenic and historical sites were

to see it but there was no shuttle bus service. So I haggled with a taxi driver for a while, and then hired a mini-van for 60 yuan.

The muscular driver squeezed into his seat and drove off into the wild countryside. Because the road was being repaired, the van pitched and rocked on the uneven surface. The driver began to regret making the trip, chastising himself: “How could I forget that the road is under repair? I shouldn’t have come at all.” He gripped the steering wheel firmly to keep the

vehicle steady.

I felt bad for dragging him into this situation, so I tried to console him by saying, “Don’t worry. Take it easy!” When we entered the mountain valley, we saw that the road had been destroyed by flood. Only a dry riverbed was accessible. With no other choice, we pushed on and finally arrived at the North Temple.

But the temple was closed. Eventually, I found the abbot and explained that I had come from far away and wanted very much to see his temple. He’s an ideal man to be in a senior position, for he proved to be very understanding. He ushered me inside. He even changed into his Buddhist robe and allowed me to take pictures.

On the way back, I looked at the scenery as the warm sunshine

closed for the next several months. The temple staff had just shut up the building and were waiting outside for a bus to take them away.

While they waited, they were exceptionally kind to me, admitting me into the temple courtyard for a quick look at the halls through the windows. The temple was magnificent, even from the outside. I complained to myself, however, what a pity and a waste it was to close the place up in mid-October while the weather was still good.

The South Temple was no ordinary Buddhist holy ground. The Sixth Dalai Lama left home in 1706 to make a tour of Tibet and Sichuan, which lasted several years. After he arrived in 1716, he decided to have his own temple built here. One of his disciples carried out his wish after his death and construction began in 1756. Four years later the temple was completed and the Qing court named it Guangzong Temple. Later, the South Temple was recognised as the temple of the Sixth Dalai Lama whose remains were interred on the temple grounds.

Walking on, I came to the foot of Zhanmao Hill where an ancient temple stood flush against some sheer cliffs. Further into the cliffs was a meditation cave. This temple has a history of more than 1,000 years. The 16th Arhat once made it his summer home, and the 17th Arhat was born here. From the great number of hadas (long pieces of silk used as offerings) strewn on the cliffs by pilgrims, one can tell this is a sacred place for Buddhists. I wanted to go into the meditation cave but it, too, was shut.

I left the magnificent South Temple with a sense of regret.

1. The illustrious North Temple presents itself suddenly in the remote mountains, surprising tourists.
2. Ornamentation on the temple gate is characteristic of Alxa.
3. Tourists may find hada on the hillside at the South Temple.
4. The recently renovated audience hall of the North Temple, built in 1804, is majestic and sacred.
5. The Alxa Museum has collected large numbers of local cultural relics.
6. On the way to the South Temple, the Buddha statue and stone inscription are visible on the cliff.

EJIN BANNER

Sites to See:

Poplar Forest — Best time for photography is October. The forest is large and a vehicle must be hired to see the poplar forests further away.

Heicheng (Black City) — An exciting must for visitors. As there is no shuttle bus service, hiring a vehicle or hitchhiking is necessary.

Strange Forest — Transportation also problematic, but this is equally worth seeing.

Entry Port — Very far away. Skip it if pressed for time.

Mirage — If you are intent on seeing one, you may be disappointed. However, focus on the distant horizon in the desert and a mirage just might appear.

Suggested length of stay: Five to eight days

Reliable contacts: Nasen (Director, Tourism Bureau, Ejin Banner; Tel: 483-6524483 or 483-6521929)

The Endless Gobi Desert

The trip to Ejin Banner from Bayan Hot did not have a smooth beginning.

I had placed too much trust in the promise of a wake-up call from the hotel staff, which never came. So I overslept and had no time to brush my teeth, wash my face or visit the toilet. I rushed out and asked



in anger as I passed the front desk, "Didn't you promise to wake me up at six?" The hotel people did not even attempt to apologise.

I was furious. What to do? I ran to the bus station, bought a packet of biscuits without checking its expiry date and hopped onto a bus. Only one bus run is made each day. The bus was old and crowded.

Soon after we left the city, we were in the Gobi Desert, where the

land lay barren beneath sand and pebbles, and the horizon was forever floating in the distance. There was not a single person, or even a tree, in sight. All that greeted my eyes were pebbles and dried grass. It was so terrifyingly desolate that it reminded me of lines from a poem: "Solitary smoke curls up in the desert; the sun sets across the river."

In ancient history, exiled officials and men of letters stood in the primitive wilderness, banished from serving their country or stripped of the chance to display their talent. They either sighed in despair or wrote down their feelings in poetic lines, which echoed for centuries against the boundless sky.

Now things are different. People come here of their own accord, full of interest and excitement. Many, like me, want to get a feel of the desolation or take photos of the scenery. Few, if any, write poetry.



EJIN BANNER

At 2 p.m., we pulled in at Ulji Town, home to a border sentry post where all vehicles and passengers must register. A snack shop sat by the roadside. The six-yuan snack was not delicious but it met the basic task of filling the stomach.

Ten years ago, someone discovered a kind of strange stone in Ulji purely by accident. This led to a large influx of people coming to search for the stone. Many left with a smile and some of the earliest comers became wealthy overnight.

We drove on, and now and then some passengers called out to the driver to stop the bus, saying they had reached their destination. I looked around each time at nothing but wilderness, as if it were another planet. Were these people extra-terrestrials?

During the trip, the bus broke down three times, taking more than three hours to fix overall. Road conditions were bad, too, with potholes of varying sizes on the pebbly road. It was already pitch dark when we approached Dalaikubu Town, the seat of Ejn Banner. The driver said to

me: "Didn't you come to see the trees? Take a look! There are trees on both sides of the road." Just as he said, wherever the headlights shone there glowed a world of golden yellow

Coming All this Way to See Trees

The Ejn River, known as Ruoshui (Weak Water) in ancient times, nourishes more than 20,000 hectares of triangular-leaved poplar trees, which comprise one of only three great poplar forests in the world. Every autumn when the leaves turn yellow, people come from far away with a single wish: to see the trees.

Before daybreak the next day, I set off to do just that. Walking along the highway out of town all alone, I soon saw large groves of poplars. The world was peacefully quiet. All of a sudden, I heard a sound in the trees and was gripped with a sense of fear. Yesterday the passengers on the bus had told me that there were wolves in Ejn. Gingerly, I took a few more steps and then saw light from a torch. Two



backpackers were taking down their tent.

Feeling greatly relieved, I stopped and talked with them. Since we were all tourists, we naturally shared the same interests and got along well. We exchanged name cards and in the torchlight, I read their names. One was called "Ant" and the other "Bulu Wolf". What a coincidence! A moment ago I was thinking of wolves and here now was a "Bulu Wolf".

Both were ardent travellers. They take trips, have experiences, write about them and then publish books. When they have made enough money from the books, they travel to another place. What a lovely way to live! Later, however, when I tried to lift their packs, my envy disappeared. Each weighed at least 40 kilogrammes, and they had to carry these packs all day long. Just the thought of it made me tired.

After packing up his things, Bulu Wolf dug a hole in the sand, buried some melon skins and put some other rubbish into a bag. Then they said goodbye and left for another day of travelling.

At this moment, shafts of morning sun pierced the forest canopy, tingeing the leaves a fiery red. I hurried to assemble my tripod for pictures....

Praying for the Camels

The Poplar Festival is a new holiday in Ejin, celebrating its second year last year.

As it coincided with the National Day holiday during the first week of October, all the hotels were packed, sending prices soaring.

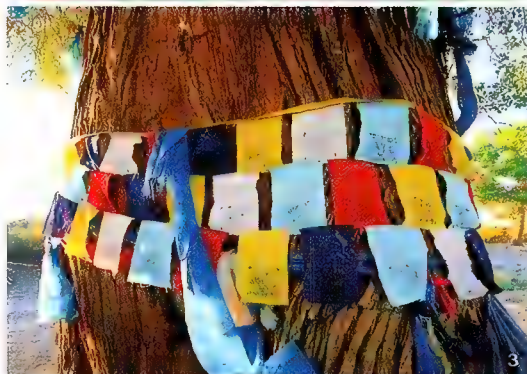
Ejin is the remotest banner in Inner Mongolia. Its 114,600-sq-km territory is sparsely populated, allowing each resident 600 hectares of land on average, or 1.8 million times the space per person in Mong Kok, Hong Kong. However, there was a particularly large turnout on the festival's opening day.

Leaders spoke, artists performed ethnic minority songs and dances, contestants wrestled in the traditional style and a horse race was held.... Suddenly my eyes lit up as I saw a camel race in progress. The riders towered on the camels' backs, while behind them clouds of dust rose up. With the cheering and urging of the crowd, the great animals dashed forward. The camel is one of the three animals I love most, the other two being the dog and the giant panda. In fact, getting to see camels was one of the purposes of my trip.

Sadly, progress in transportation has made camels, or "ships in the desert", obsolete. This, coupled with drought and the pursuit of economic gain, means the number of camels drops year by year. A local friend told me that a Japanese company came to invest in Alxa in 1982 to produce cashmere, rapidly increasing the goat population. The result has been destruction of the environment and very low prices for camel wool, as it cannot match goat wool in value. The fate of the camel is sorrowful indeed.

The camels that had finished racing came back. Seeing their sad eyes, I was deeply affected. When needed by humankind, they displayed their reliability and loyalty generation after generation, sharing weal and woe with the desert residents. Now they seem to be awaiting dismissal. Perhaps one day we will only see them at scenic sites as tourist attractions.

On the hill, a sacrificial ceremony was being staged. A group of senior Lamas blew bugles and recited scriptures, expressing their traditional wish amidst curling incense smoke. I wondered if their prayers included any plea for the camels.



Previous page (main): The flourishing poplar, growing on both sides of the Ejin River, charms tourists.

Previous page (inset): Camels here are happier than the ones in the desert because of the poplar.

1. The annual Poplar Festival lures many tourists.

2. At the opening ceremony of the Poplar Festival, wrestlers compete intensely.

3. Four or five people can embrace a huge poplar, which is worshiped as a "godlike tree" by local people.

4. A group of senior Lamas blow bugles when a sacrificial ceremony takes place.

5. A mirage can emerge at any moment. (by Yang Xiao)



“Nasen Mirage” — Sights Unseen

The Gobi Desert was monotonous and desolate, but occasionally there were magical sights, too.

Nasen from the Tourism Bureau drove me to see the Entry Port on the border with Mongolia. As we drove through the desert, I suddenly saw in the distance a vast sea dotted with dozens of small islands. Long ago, the place had been crisscrossed by rivers and inlaid with lakes, but years of continued drought had ended that. Had a miracle occurred? I pointed out what I saw to Nasen who laughed: “That’s a mirage, something you frequently see in the desert.”

As if to prove his statement, fantastic views danced out now and then. When I chose a higher position from which to take pictures, the

views seemed to dip lower. If we drove faster to get nearer, they retreated, never allowing a true look of them.

Nasen suggested that since I was so interested in mirages, he could take me to a better place to see some the next day.

He came to pick me up shortly after four early next morning. We covered more than 70 kilometres of bumpy, dusty road and arrived at a dry lakebed before dawn. In the 1980s, it was still the site of the



rippling Juyan Lake. I set up my tripod and stared into the horizon where the sky was revealing a trace of pale light, all the time listening to Nasen's wonderful stories.

I asked him why we had to travel so far. "Originally this was a big lake. The air is still damp and the place offers a panoramic view. The only drawback today is that there is some wind." Several years ago, he twice saw some incredible views — streets, buildings, and busy traffic — all in the morning. This sounded different from what I had read in books about mirages appearing only in strong sunshine. So I laughingly referred to what he suggested as a "Nasen mirage".

The day began to break and entered the time range for a Nasen mirage, but there was nothing unusual to see. As the sun rose, it transformed the lakebed into a world of golden colour. An ordinary sunrise.

Both of us were disappointed.

Profile: Shepherd Zhu Haijun

While I was taking pictures with a group of photography lovers in the poplar forest by the Manshui Bridge, I noticed a girl in a red headscarf dashing towards us on a motorbike. As the motorcycle got nearer, I realised that the rider was not a girl, but a young man. He had come to round up his sheep and lead them home, as was his daily routine. Soon we became friends and he took me to his home.

He lived in a lovely poplar grove. While sitting in his yurt, enjoying a piece of the "moon cake" that he had just brought back from his granny's place, I chatted with him. His name was Zhu Haijun, and he was 17 years old. Two years ago, he returned home after graduation from junior middle school to tend sheep.

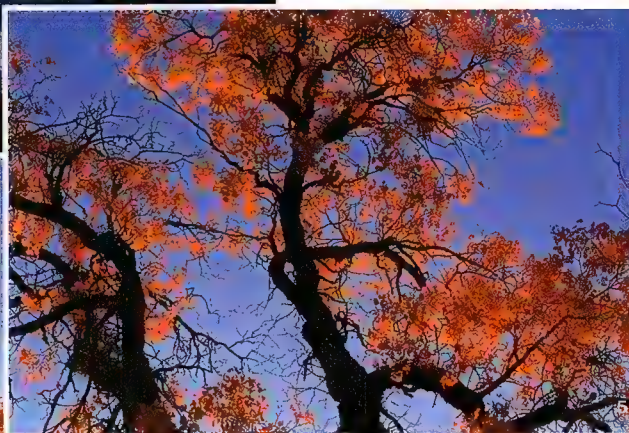
This was the most beautiful and pleasant season of the year, said Haijun. Soon the cold winter would arrive and they would have to move into a permanent house for the duration. When summer came, he would go and tend his sheep in a more distant place. I could notice that he was reluctant to leave.



On the way back, Nasen suggested that we go to the top of Aobao Hill. By following a dried up canal, we walked up to the hilltop where immediately we felt a surge of excitement. There were mirages in all directions! We saw lakes, islands and forests. The largest view was inside the

territory of Mongolia where although the glorious world that emerged did not exist, it was as beautiful as a watercolour painting.

1. Most people who live in the area of the poplar woods raise camels and sheep. Every household has an area of poplar woods.
2. Many poplars have died of dry rot, which can be seen everywhere.
3. The dead poplars stand upright to meet the dusk in the Strange Forest.
4. Tracts of dead poplars make up the Strange Forest.
5. Meanwhile, poplar woods in the vicinity of Heicheng are flourishing.
6. Zhu Haijun shepherds by motorcycle every day.



EJIN BANNER

Heicheng: Bearing the Weight of Ejin's History

Getting to Heicheng was going to be a challenge as there was no public transport whatsoever. While I was trying to find a vehicle to hire outside the hotel, I ran into photographer Wang Jianjun who was about to take a large group of photography enthusiasts on a trip. He stuck his head out of the bus window and shouted, "Mr. Huang! It's you. Hop in and go to Heicheng with us." Once again, friendship came to my rescue. A decade earlier, I had recommended his works to a photography journal and wrote an article in praise of them. At the time, he was still an amateur photographer.

We set out from Dalaihubu Town and passed the Strange Forest. This was a patch of poplar trees that had died several hundred years previously, before the river that formerly ran through the forest

changed course. From a distance, the forest resembles a battlefield with dead bodies strewn everywhere, sending chills down the spines of all who see it. In the Strange Forest, every tree was twisted as if struggling and screaming in pain or shouting for help. In fact, I could not really find adequate words to describe the tragedy they seemed to have endured. The disaster must have been devastating and lasted a long time. As a result, the site exuded a profound sense of crisis. The Strange Forest is now a tourist attraction with an admission charge of five yuan per person. We stepped off the bus and entered.

Even after several hours people were reluctant to leave. Some stood on the hillside, deep in thought. Some seemed lost in an endless examination of the dead trees. Heedful of the rising sun, Wang Jianjun assembled his tour group and urged everyone to re-board for





and entered the city, which was almost completely swallowed up by sand. Visible traces of history reminded me of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. There are thought-provoking similarities between the two places; both were built around the 10th century and destroyed in the 14th century, and both disappeared mysteriously for several hundred years. The difference is that Heicheng suffers repeated sandstorms and is forever at the mercy of the elements, while Angkor Wat is hidden in a primitive forest, protected by a world of greenery.

At the northwest corner of the

dead city is the site of a dried up well. It was said to have been dug by the defending general as a hiding place for his fortune when the city was under siege. With tears in his eyes, he also pushed his family into the well. That done, the general



Heicheng.

The sun was about to set when we finally reached our destination. People jumped off

led his forces against the enemy and was killed in the desert.

I noticed some of the other tourists acting strangely, kicking the ground here and there. They seemed to be searching for something, and indeed they were. In 1908, a Russian by the name of P. K. Kozlov bribed some local officials and was able to take away large quantities of treasures on the backs of nearly 100 camels. The event shocked the world. Later, other foreigners, including A. Stein and H. Sven Anders, came one after another to plunder the ancient city, leaving Heicheng utterly ransacked. Yet even now, nearly a hundred years on, the dream of instant wealth continues.

Darkness fell and those tourists looking for treasure left weary and disappointed. I hope they remain disappointed.

the bus and rushed about like madmen, trying to capture the glory of the city before nightfall.

Heicheng had known its own moment of glory; in 1038, it was a military stronghold under the reign of the Western Xia. Then, in 1226, it was attacked by Genghis Khan. By 1372, Ming troops had the city besieged. Unable to take it by force, they diverted the river's course and cut off the water supply to Heicheng, after which the city collapsed.

I ascended the towering city wall built on a sand hill

1. Heicheng, at one time, was a big border city. Now it is buried in sand blown by the wind.
2. Remains of dead poplars, hundreds of years old, can still be seen at the foot of the ruined wall of Datong.
3. Hundreds of tombs of the Western Xia Dynasty have been devastated by time and the elements.
4. Part of the Poplar Forest can be seen in a sand dune area on the way to Heicheng.



1

THE ALXA RIGHT BANNER

Treating the Drunkard with Kindness

Sites to See:

The depths of the Badain Jaran Desert — The best choice for adventure. Unusual sights but the trip is hard. Be well prepared.

Baoritaolegai (Edge of the Desert) — The second choice for desert tours. A day trip if you set out from Yabrai.

Haisenchulu — Very far away, must be reached by car. Skip it if you have a tight schedule.

Hongdunzi Mountain Valley — Unique scenery, certainly worth seeing. Hire a vehicle to get there.

Mandra Rock Paintings — Rare rock paintings. Transportation is rather difficult.

Suggested length of stay: Five days in the desert. Another three to five days for the other sights.

Reliable contacts: Wang Buhe (Director, Tourism Bureau, Alxa Right Banner; Tel: 86-483-6024316)

Nabchi (Deputy Director, Tourism Bureau; Tel: 86-483-6022014)

I got on a long-distance bus to the Alxa Right Banner with the

great hope of going into the Badain Jaran Desert. I had called the league's Tourism Bureau for assistance beforehand.

The bus had not yet started its engine when I was struck by a strong smell of alcohol. Later in the crowded bus, I noticed an old man sitting in the aisle. He appeared to be drunk, as he rocked in exaggerated fashion to the churning of the engine. Soon, he produced a bottle of beer from his bag and drank half of it before he set it on the floor in front of him. When the bus driver stepped on the brake, the bottle toppled over and out flowed the beer. The man did not notice. When he took up the bottle to drink, he found it empty. So he took out another bottle and later beer spilt out of that one, too. Apparently, he wanted to get very drunk. The best way to stop a drunkard is not to try to stop him. It seemed all the passengers understood this rule, for no one intervened. Nor did they show any disgust towards the old man. All they did was smile at him kindly. Someone even freed a seat for him. By the time he finished the fourth bottle, the floor was flooded with beer.

Two hours later, someone shouted to remind the man that he

had reached his destination, and he staggered off the bus.

Forgoing the Rock Paintings

We pulled into Menggen where the driver had decided to stop for lunch. The tiny town had only one street.

As soon as I got off the bus, I felt something was not right. Several people approached me, all staring at me. My instincts said they were up to no good. Out of a busload of people they had singled me out! Perhaps it was my trousers, which had six pockets, or my 15-pocket photographer's vest, something not commonly seen in these parts.

One of them opened his mouth. "Where do you come from?"
"From a very faraway place."

"Are you Mr. Huang?" Suddenly, all my worries vanished.

"The Tourism Bureau wants you to get off at Yabrai and go to the desert from there."

Someone from the Tourism Bureau had made this arrangement to save me time after learning that I was travelling on this bus.

While the driver ate his lunch, I walked about the street. I saw a cultural station, a typical place for mass gatherings in the 1960s. In the station courtyard there were table tennis tables, a reading room, a darkroom for processing photos and an exhibition room with lots of pictures on the walls. There was also a photographic exhibit of Mandra

rock paintings, which I examined closely. I was surprised. In a valley of just 18 square kilometres, there were more than 6,000 rock paintings dating from the New Stone Age all the way to the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), portraying scenes of hunting and nomadic life.

I approached someone who appeared to be in charge and asked how far it was to the rock-painting site and whether it was accessible by bus. He said that



1. The camels of the Badain Jaran Desert and the local people depend on each other for survival. (by Zuo Zhulin)
2. A swan dances lightly on the lake at Baoritaolegai.
3. A flock of widgeons inhabiting a sand dune area rely upon a pool of lake water.
4. Herdsmen deep in the Badain Jaran Desert live by the lake.



THE ALXA RIGHT BANNER



the trip could take four hours both ways, but that I would have to hire a vehicle.

Within minutes the news that I wanted to see the rock paintings had spread through the small town. Two people came to ask if I was willing to go for 100 yuan. Although this was not expensive at all, I could not spare the time and declined the offers tactfully.

Yabrai Salt Farm in the Desert

At 3:00 p.m., I got off at Yabrai.

As I had some time to kill, I wandered around the nice little town. Its single, three-kilometre-long street was flanked by towering poplars. The residents all seemed to have a peaceful existence; many of them were gathered in the square by the road. There were vegetable pedlars, retirees enjoying their leisure time and pupils on

holiday. As I stood in front of the cinema, it took a moment before I realised that the film advertisements were two years old.

It was still early, so I went to the salt farm. In the vast and desolate Gobi Desert, the salt farm was considered a major enterprise. I saw a salt lake 10 kilometres wide and three kilometres long but no rippling water. Instead, the lake was divided up into smaller pools of water and silvery alkali beaches. I learned that the entire salt lake had been developed. People used rakes to separate out the raw salt, which would solidify into grains several days later. The same dredging



process can be repeated every seven or eight years. It seemed the lake would never be exhausted.

A Greening Undertaking

In the evening, I met Nabchi from the Tourism Bureau. A typical Mongolian woman, short and heavily built, she looked very kind. Her name in Mongolian means, "leaf". She smiled as she told me that her name sounded light but her weight was not.

She said that a Japanese group was going into the desert the next day and that we would tag along with them.

Before we set out, I met the dozen group members. Mr. Tadaki Kawai chatted with me, saying that they belonged to a society committed to greening the desert and that their president was Masaichi Toyama. I had heard Toyama's story before and now I got a better understanding of his dedication to greening the desert through the respectful

demeanour of the society members.

He started planting trees as early as the 1930s when he arrived in China and bought some saplings for 30 yuan and began to put them into the soil. Later, he was compelled to stop because of war.

In Japan, Mr. Toyama spent 20 years taming the desert and planting trees. Now 90 percent of the desert in Japan has been turned into farmland.

Mr. Toyama is 96 years old. Twenty years ago, he opened a grape orchard at Shapotou in Ningxia. His greatest greening project, however, is in the Kubchi Desert in Inner Mongolia. Every year he organises people to plant trees there. For 10 years, the place called Engbei, which is 23 times the size of Tian'anmen Square, has gradually become a sea of green trees numbering two million. Additionally, more than 5,000 ostriches are being raised in the wilds of this desert oasis.

For this trip, the delegation was led by Mr. Toyama's son on an inspection tour of Alxa. His interpreter said that the Badain Jaran Desert was likely to be their next target for greening the land.

The degree of attention shown to the desert by the Japanese took me by surprise. Desertification is not only a threat to China, but to Japan as well. I have heard that the air over Japan already contains grains of sand from Inner Mongolia. These granules travel across the sea like little warnings, increasing awareness about the threat of deserts left unchecked.

A Fairyland

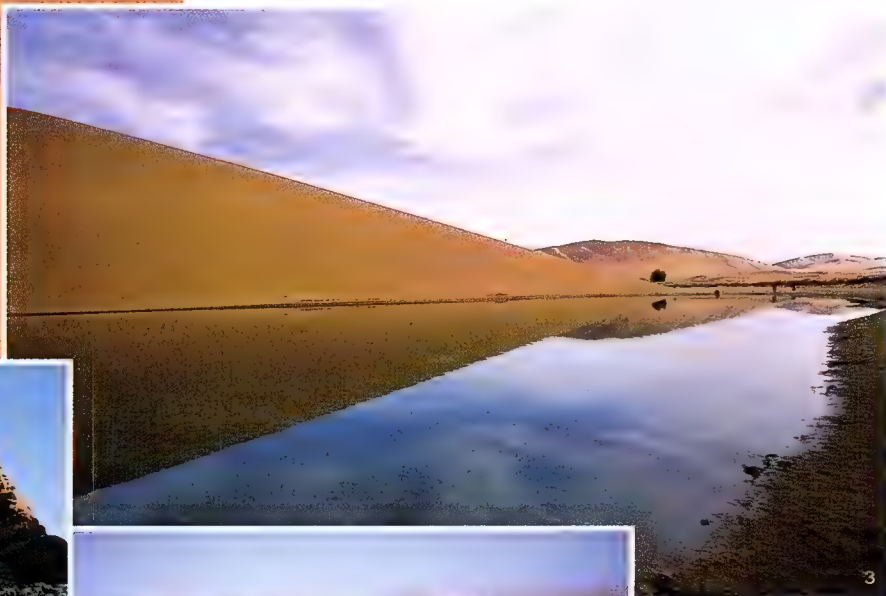
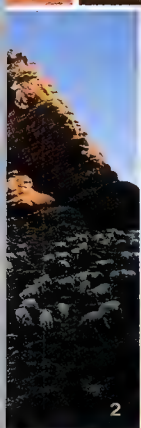
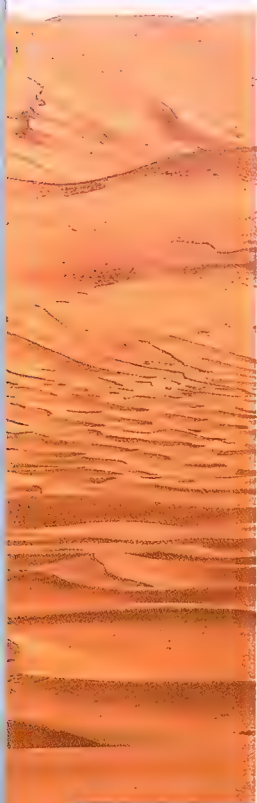
The Badain Jaran Desert is home to the largest sand dunes in the world, with the highest one rising more than 500 metres. In 1996, a German explorer wrote about the desert, which was previously little known in Europe. At the World Adventure Travel Expo held in the United States in 1998, Badain Jaran comprised the only exhibit from China.

After setting off from Yabrai, we soon arrived at the edge of the desert. Nabchi and I rode in a vehicle with a driver called Bagna who was skilled at desert driving. Once inside the desolate landscape, there was no road and he had to follow his instincts,

exploring the undulating dunes and searching out a path all at once. When we stopped to rest, I asked the Japanese guests how they felt. They all looked a bit wary.

We arrived at Baoritaolegai, a lake in the midst of the sea of sand,

1. Because of drought, the tired camels — the ships in the desert — can only walk in a short distance.
2. Flocks of sheep wander in the Red Stone Valley.
3. The Humming Sand Dune in the vicinity of the lake at Baoritaolegai has attracted many researchers from foreign countries.
4. More and more people go deeper into the Badain Jaran Desert by vehicles in recent years.



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like something in a fairy tale. The lake lay near some 300-metre-tall sand dunes, which rose abruptly from the ground, with slopes so straight and sharp that they seemed to have been sliced by knives. Wild ducks, several swans and egrets swam leisurely on the surface. I took out my camera and stealthily approached the swans, but soon more people arrived. The swans then stretched out their necks and paused on the water. I quickly changed lenses and was able to take only one shot with my long-range lens before they took off for the sky, their bodies extended in beautiful postures.

Several people climbed a particular sand hill and then slid down it again. This was the famous Singing Sand Hill but as we were there soon after a rain, all the sand had turned quiet. In fact, 70 percent of the sand in the Badain Jaran is "singing" sand, constituting the world's largest singing sand area. In the summer of 2000, two people from the acoustic museum in Britain came to record the singing of the sand; they were greatly surprised by the sound, which roared like airplane engines.

The Red Stone Valley

Buhe from the Tourism Bureau accompanied me to the Hongdunzi Valley. He seemed as excited about this trip as I was. I asked him why

and found out that it was his hometown, where he had taught for 20 years. A small path zigzagged forward. On the way, we met several villagers, all of whom turned out to be former students. I commented that "he had students all over the world." He corrected me by saying he "had students all over the countryside." Almost none of his students had had the opportunity to leave the area because of the poor economic situation.

I suggested that the valley's name, "Hongdunzi" (which means "a heap of red dust"), be changed to Red Stone (Hongshi) Valley which was easier to pronounce and thus more likely to become better known. Buhe agreed with me. Its location blessed the valley with a relatively damp climate and the occasional green tree and other plant life.

For lunch, we sat on the grassland where Buhe had tended sheep in childhood. Our driver, Bagna, produced some buns, pickles and mutton. Buhe broke some branches off of a splendid achnatherum plant to use as chopsticks. A drought-resistant plant over 30 cm tall, the achnatherum is ideal feed for camels. Buhe said that in the past the plant was much taller. As a child, he could pick the blossoms off of one while riding on the back of a camel.

Hidden deep in a mountain of rock, the Red Stone Valley was not



easy to find. If Buhe had not led the way, I never would have found it. Our vehicle snaked its way over a soft, earthen path that had recently been washed by floodwater, before it finally pulled to a stop at the entrance to the valley. The valley stretched from north to south in the shape of a letter Y for a length of five kilometres. A stone wall near the entrance to the valley was the legacy of an ancient battlefield. At the other end of the valley was another wall whose history has yet to be determined by specialists.

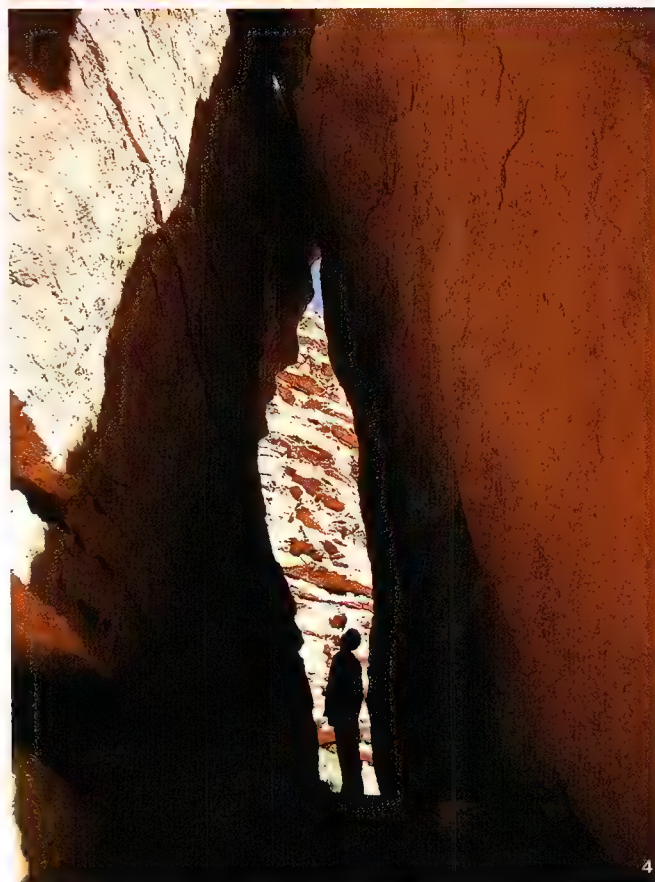
The valley is flanked by sheer, orange-coloured cliffs, which tower some 80 metres high. At the narrowest point, you can only see the slimmest strip of sky. As I looked up from the valley floor, I watched a shaft of light from the opening dance eerily in the red shadows. I was suddenly reminded of King Valley and Ayers Rock in central Australia. Although the valley here was smaller, its situation and colouring were more impressive. And while the places in Australia are top tourist attractions, this valley is a wilderness frequented only by shepherds.

The charm of the Red Stone Valley lies in the attitudes and shapes of the rocks. The beautiful red mountain stones resemble anything from the Leaning Tower of Pisa to ferocious lions. The most attractive one is in the form of an eagle perched atop a cliff. Another huge stone appears to be a dragon's head and is in turn revered by the local people as a godly rock.

Since the human population is small in this region, the place features a wide range of wildlife. The cliffs are dotted with numerous caves, which are natural homes to blue sheep, pigeons and weasels. Buhe told me that the weasel droppings were a kind of expensive medicinal ingredient. I looked carefully at the caves, which had smaller caves inside the big ones, just like modern housing with living rooms and bedrooms. Some of the caves were connected. I am sure anyone daring enough to explore them would be rewarded with interesting findings.

On the road back, we came across a herd of over 300 goats picking their way along the cliffs and showing not the slightest fear. Suddenly I heard a thunderous cracking noise and thought that some stones must have rolled down the cliff side. I looked round to see that the sound came from some goats that were fighting, butting heads and crashing their horns together.

Outside the Red Stone Valley there is another patch of red cliffs rising more than a hundred metres and revealing layer upon layer of distinct veins. Pigeons flew in and out of the caves. Of all the rocks and cliffs I have seen, this site was quite special. At the foot of the cliffs is a rock that resembles a huge frog opening its mouth to the sky. The local people say this was once a godly frog to which they now pray for good weather.



1. Massive red cliffs rise above the ground in the Gobi Desert.
2. Aoyun Dalai holds a desert cistanche weighing 14 kilogrammes.
3. The Alxa Right Banner, at one time, was the native place of camels.
4. Only one person at a time may pass through "a gleam from heaven" in the Red Stone Valley.

THE ALXA RIGHT BANNER



The Stone Forest, a Rare Sight

This place is little known to outsiders, but one look at a picture of it convinced me that it would be worth visiting.

We set out from the Alxa Right Banner and, dozens of kilometres later, we were in the Gobi Desert where the highway disappeared. We had to follow a beaten track referred to as the "Natural Road". I found the name apt, for year in and year out the track is swept by wind, and then covered by sand according to Nature's whims. The surface, which reminded me of fish bones, was really bumpy. When the wind started up, the rising sand and dust forced the driver to keep his eyes carefully trained on the tracks left by previous vehicles. If he lost sight of them and veered off, we could end up anywhere.

At noon we arrived at Altengtlgacha, which means "golden beach" in Mongolian. In the desert not far away, the surging winds of the Badain Jaran Desert, like invasive waves, had created "drifts" of sand, which, sadly clashed with the nice sounding name of the place.

Further on, we entered Nurigasum. This kingdom of strange-looking rocks covers an area of 20 square kilometres. The place is 220 kilometres from the seat of the Alxa Right Banner and is inhabited by only one family. Fortunately, the hostess was at home, so we had a place to stay for the night.

We went into the Stone Forest before sunset. Bagna focused on driving while I looked out the window in an agitated, confused manner. One strangely-shaped rock followed fast upon another. I had to keep



my aesthetic sensibilities on high alert, so that when I saw something of particular interest, I would remember it when I returned the next day.

Buhe said that during his western expedition, Genghis Khan and his army had cooked with a natural stone pot found here at Haisenchulu. I did not really believe the story because I did not find that cooking pot. However, any number of hollowed out stones that could have been used as containers littered the place. When we got back to our lodgings, I saw a natural stone bowl in which the host cooked herbal medicines.

Early the next day, I hurried out to photograph the sunrise. Suddenly nature called; perhaps I had eaten too much mutton the night before. In an inconspicuous spot behind a mound, I squatted down. Just then the sun rose from behind the hills. In the distance, a pair of camels paced about leisurely. Our host's cat,

whose leash was tied to a stone outside their dwelling, kept mewling. The sun shone down on the Gobi Desert and seemed to be dancing on all the pebbles.

Later that morning, I went back to the Stone Forest at Haisenchulu. As we had other places to visit, we only had two hours here. We drove slowly through the Stone Forest along a dried-up ditch. When I saw anything particularly fantastic, I asked the driver to stop. The further we went, the more fantastic the views became. The place was rare indeed. The stones took on the most amazing shapes — huge mushrooms, galloping horses, and monstrous beasts. If not for its remote location, the place would have become a favoured tourist spot long ago.

A Profile: Aoyun Dalai

Aoyun Dalai's home was on our way to Haisenchulu, where the Stone Forest lies. We had lunch at his home.

He was a team (a subdivision of a village) leader, but in this expansive area his was the only household around. Apparently, it was no easy job to be a team leader. The area had suffered severe drought for two consecutive years and most of his sheep had either died or been sold off, leaving him with a herd of about 20. He also had 80 camels, a fairly large number for his township. They had survived thanks to his grove of desert cistanche.

Several years before, he had grafted nearly 2,000 hectares of salsola plants onto his desert cistanche. Now his efforts have helped to stabilise the sand dunes, he has harvested great quantities of desert cistanche, and his camels had food to tide them over the winter. At his home I noticed a very large desert cistanche which weighed 14 kilograms. He said that he had dug it out only a few days before; it was the largest he had ever seen.

Aoyun's family was fairly well to do. Not only did they own a motor vehicle and two motorcycles, but also their two daughters were studying in Hohhot, the capital of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

There were also the ruins of an ancient city. A stone tablet explained that a county magistrate had visited the place on the 15th day of the fourth lunar month in 1699. Not far from the ruins was the Poplar Gully. Though the trees were not tall, the way they grew was impressive; they squeezed out of cracks on mountain rocks and shot out in all directions. Seen from on high, they dazzled — a patch of golden yellow against an otherwise gray background — as if vitality itself had gained some small but significant foothold in this desolate landscape.

I was moved again.



Translated by Huang Youyi

1. Stepping on a strange towering rock one looks insignificant.
2. This rock resembles a night owl.
3. The mushroom-shaped strange rock also looks like a pair of outspread wings.
4. Differently-shaped strange rocks are found everywhere in Haisenchulu's Stone Forest.
5. A canyon of poplars in the stone forest covers an area of 20 sq km.





Transport

There are many routes for travelling in Alxa. One can set off from Yinchuan or Lanzhou. Both cities are easily accessible with convenient transport facilities, such as railway, highways, and airports.

Flight: Tourists can fly from Guangzhou in Guangdong Province to Yinchuan or Lanzhou. The Dingxin Airport in Ejin Banner offers flights to Xi'an and Beijing every Tuesday and Saturday. For more information on flights and hotels, please refer to the Executive's Memo on p. 86-87.

Routes

The westernmost league in Inner Mongolia, Alxa encompasses Alxa Left Banner, Alxa Right Banner and Ejin Banner. Situated together in a triangular shape, each banner is 600 km from the others, with sections of the Gobi Desert lying between them.

1. From Yinchuan, take a bus to Bayan Hot, capital of Alxa League. There are lots of scheduled buses. Duration: about 90 minutes. Get off at Nansi. After visiting scenic spots in Alxa Left Banner, take a bus to Ejin Banner. Duration: one day. Fare: 80 yuan.
After visiting Ejin Banner, return to Alxa Left

Banner the same way by bus. Then, set off from Bayan Hot to Alxa Right Banner. Duration: one day. Fare: 70 yuan.

Afterwards, take a bus to Jinchang, and then another bus to Lanzhou. Duration: more than half a day. Fare: 70 yuan.

2. Set off from Lanzhou to Alxa Right Banner. After visiting the scenic spots, go on to Alxa Left Banner and Ejin Banner. Return by bus to Jiuquan; 400 kilometres, 60 yuan, fair road conditions. On arrival in Jiuquan, take a train to leave the area. This route is the most time saving. Bear in mind that transport is halted for a few days every October due to satellite maintenance.
3. For tourists who hire cars or drive their own cars, there is a faster route: Go from Lanzhou to Alxa Right Banner. After touring the Badan Jaran Desert and other spots, continue on to Ejin Banner, passing scenic spots like Haisenchulu. (Since this is a naturally-formed route on the desert, tourists are advised to hire a local to lead them). Then, go to Alxa Left Banner, and finally Yinchuan.
4. From Lanzhou, travel to the Alxa Right and Left Banner, and Ejin Banner. Then, go by car to the Dingxin Airport in Dalai Hubu Town in Ejin Banner.

Distance: 223 kilometres. Flying out saves much time, but be sure to carefully check the flight schedule.

Travel Season: In winter and spring, Alxa is cold, dry and windy. The best time to visit is from May to November, and autumn, when the leaves turn golden, is especially lovely. In October, Ejin Banner has temperatures as low as 0°C. Tourists must bring enough warm clothes.

Alxa Left Banner

Suggested routes:

One-day tour: South Temple, Prince Palace, Yanfu Temple;

Two-day tour: Day 1- (same as above)

Day 2-Moon Lake in Tengger;

Three-day tour: Day 1 & 2- (same as above)

Day 3-North Temple, Jilantai Salt Ground, Chongrong Base.

Transport:

To Moon Lake: Hire a car or contact related organisations stationed in Alxa Left Banner.

Tel: 483-8593054

To South Temple: Take a car from Yinchuan to Bayan Hot. Stop at the temple midway through the trip.

To North Temple: Take a taxi. Fare: 50-80 yuan (return).





Accommodation:

Desert King Hotel: 160 yuan/ room
 Jiuhan Tiancheng Hostel: 86 yuan/ room
 Alxa League Hotel: 160 yuan/ room

Admission Fees:

South Temple: 25 yuan; Yanfu Temple: 2 yuan;
 Prince Palace: 5 yuan

Ejin Banner

Suggested routes:

One-day tour: Strange Forest, Red City, No. 1 Pagoda, Datong City, Black Water City;
 Two-day tour: Day 1- (same as above)
 Day 2-Badan Jaran Desert (at the northern border), Alxa Museum, Tawang Palace;
 Three-day tour: Day 1 & 2- (same as above)
 Day 3-Ceke Port, National Gate, Immortal Tree, Daxi Aobao, Lama Monastery.

Remarks: The above tours are only suitable for sightseers. For photo enthusiasts, must-see places include Erdaoqiao and Poplar Village situated at the boundary of Dalai Kubu Town, or Sidaoqiao, Oidaoqiao and Badaoqiao located farther away.

Notes: Since Ejin Banner is near the border, tourists have to apply for a permit and pass through the Uliji Checkpoint before entering. Contact the Ejin Travel Bureau in advance. Contact person: Nasen. Tel: 483-6524483; or contact the Bayan Hot and League Travel Bureau. Contact person: Xin Chaoyong. Tel: 483-8337272, 13804731217.

Transport: Transport in Ejin is extremely inconvenient. There are neither scheduled buses nor special-route tour buses. Tourists can only take a taxi or hire a car. Or, contact the

travel bureau or join the local tours.

Accommodation: Prices may rise during the peak travel season in October.

Ejin Hotel: 136 yuan/ room
 Tianlong Hotel: 150 yuan/ room
 Youdian Hotel: 120 yuan/ room
 New China Guesthouse: 100 yuan/ room

Admission Fees: Group ticket (Strange Wood, Red City, No. 1 Pagoda, Datong City, Black City): 50 yuan
 Tawang Palace: 5 yuan

Alxa Right Banner

Suggested routes:

Three-day tour: Day 1: Mandela Mural, Agui

Monastery, Rock Gully

Day 2: Baoritaolegai Desert

Day 3: Red Rocky Gully

Nine-day tour: Day 1-5: Exploration in the hinterland of the Badan Jaran Desert

Day 6: Red Rocky Gully

Day 7: Madra Rock Paintings, Agui Monastery, Rock Gully

Day 8-9: Haisenchulu

Notes: While it is a very exciting experience entering the heart of the Badan Jaran Desert, tourists must prepare for hardships and all tours there must be guided by locals. Aside from taking a jeep, you may also hire a camel. The time needed for a return trip by camel is about eight days, with two people sharing four camels (two for each tourist, one for the guide, and one to carry their belongings). The cost is 200 yuan per camel per day.

Transport:

Tourists may need to hire a car to tour the Alxa Right Banner. Contact the Alxa Right Banner Travel Bureau. Tel: 86-483-6024316

Fare (to common spots): 500 yuan/ day; (to the hinterland of the desert): 2,500 yuan (return for 3-5 days' trip).

Accommodation:

Alxa Right Banner Hotel: 180 yuan/room.



HK MOSAIC

Reminiscence in

Tai O

Photos & article by Dianna Lau





I can't remember when I first visited Tai O, a small village on Lantau Island. But I do recall taking the hand-pulled ferry; it was unforgettable. Tens of people crowded onto a rectangular wooden boat seven metres long and two metres wide. Then, the boatman pulled on the rope that was tied to the opposite bank over 20 metres away. This primitive, "human" method of transport became my single and lasting impression of Tai O.



Revisiting Tai O, 1998

Years later I paid Tai O a second visit. On a summer afternoon in 1998, two years after the hand-pulled ferry had been replaced by the Tai O Chung Footbridge, I went there to take photographs with my friends. By following other visitors, we set off from Tai O Pier and passed residences with salted fish hanging outside them. As we came to the footbridge, I took a few pictures, with a banner proclaiming Tai O as "Venice in the Orient" in the background. I was soon hurried forward. I passed Wing On Street, Tai Ping Street, and stilt-house areas such as Yat Chung and Sam Chung. Then, my trip ended as soon as I snapped my last photo at the Yeung Hau Old Temple.

Not until I was leaving Tai O did I feel a sense of loss, though I carried plenty of products from the sea in my hands.

The "Real" Tai O

From that point, the desire to experience Tai O fully was fixed in my mind. Earlier this year, I decided to go back again, but alone this time. It took less than half an hour from Central to reach Tung Chung by MTR. After another 45 minutes on an air-conditioned bus from the Tung Chung Bus Terminus, I arrived at Tai O — a fairly convenient journey.

As soon as I got off the bus, I noticed that the popular stall that had sold tofu pudding in the past had been moved to a nearby

street. And Tai O itself sported a new image, in which public lavatories, road signs and tourist maps of the streets are in good repair and supply. Walking along Wing On Street, I soon reached the Tai O Chung Footbridge. I slowed my steps to observe the flow of tourists and boatmen. Only in a relaxed mood would I

discover the other face of Tai O. Fishermen with their large seafood catches moored their boats under the bridge from which people pointed here and there, negotiating prices with them.

Further on, I saw seafood shops displaying home-made shrimp pastes and offering free samples



to visitors. There was an old guy flogging his secret-recipe, hometown, tangerine-in-honey confection. He called out in a spirited, friendly way, "Try it; I made it myself. Try it even if you don't buy." I was touched even without tasting his food. The snack stand long-beloved by tourists was still here, where local food, like roasted cuttlefish and biscuits with sweet maltose filling, were made to order. Each sold at the low price of about three dollars.

1. Tai O, an unique fishing village in Hong Kong.
- 2,3. The hand-pulled ferry was eventually replaced by the Tai O Chung Footbridge in 1996.
4. Sunning salted fish is still a common practice of the locals. Salted fish is a must-buy for visitors to Tai O.

Tai O Culture Workshop

Tai O is much easier to get around nowadays, especially with the help of the **Tai O Culture Workshop** on Wing On Street. Established June 24, 2001, by a group of locals enthusiastic about social activities, it is a resident-based centre which organises and promotes research into and exchanges about Tai O culture.

The workshop is undoubtedly the best place to begin learning about Tai O. During my visit, there was a photo exhibition featuring landscapes of Tai O in the 1950s-60s, as well as daily necessities lent by local fishermen. These gave some concept of the development and customs of Tai O's residents. The workshop itself is a nice building. The oldest part of this two-storey house dates back more than a hundred years. The owner lives on the second floor, while the kitchen on the ground floor comprises the most realistic part of the exhibition.

As I was making notes for my article, a woman sitting near the entrance kept reminding visitors that taking photos was prohibited, like some loyal security guard. Later, I learnt she was actually the owner of the workshop. Her devotion was truly commendable.

The Value of a Public Organisation

In the reception area of the workshop, Miss Wong Wai King, the workshop's founder, was smiling broadly. That day, some friends had come to Tai O from the urban centre to install some computer software, voluntarily improving the information facilities. Since the workshop is a public organisation, the members do everything themselves. They have applied for only one year's subsidy from the International Fund Society following several setbacks, but they will have to seek support from other organisations after June of this year. Therefore, Miss Wong is planning to organise some ecotours in Tai O. Besides promoting the natural and historical landscapes of Tai O, the tour will raise money for the operations budget and will publicise diverse types of cultural research going on in Tai O.

Though the workshop is housed in a very basic structure, the concept of the operation and the passion of its members affect every visitor, giving it a high reputation. I just hope it can survive in



the commercialised environment of Hong Kong.

Embracing the Past for the Future

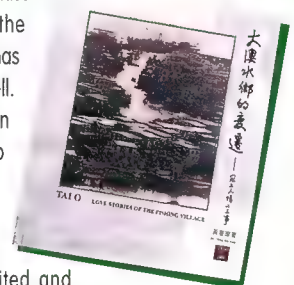
Just a few steps from the workshop, I saw a simple shop with the words "**Shui Heung: Water Village**" written on one wall. Here there were many pictures and newspaper cuttings showcasing the

The Birth of Tai O — Love Stories of the Fishing Village:

A lifelong resident of Tai O, Miss Wong Wai King deeply loves the place where she was raised and has countless childhood stories to tell. Seeing the changes to Tai O in recent years, she felt compelled to create a book about its history.

Through her concentrated efforts, and with the wholehearted support of the locals, she visited and conducted interviews with more than 300 elders born in Tai O. She also contacted Chan Chik, an experienced reporter who collects historical photos of Tai O. With the financial support of the Art Development Bureau, and at great expense to herself, *Tai O — Love Stories of the Fishing Village* was finally published in 2000. This lovely, bilingual book admirably preserves the history of Tai O.

Though they faced many difficulties in the course of production, they gained an encouraging response from the public. Once, a Japanese man who had loved Tai O for years and was deeply moved by the book, flew from Japan to meet Miss Wong, who in turn became his personal tour guide. She helped him experience the genuine Tai O. This reward was proof that what she had done was worth it.



Tai O Culture Workshop

Add: G/F, 54 Wing On Street, Tai O, Lantau Island

Tel: (852) 29856118

Service hours: Every Saturday & Sunday (13:00-18:00)

Free admission.

Note: An art exhibition about Tai O has been going on since March. In July, there will be an ecotour focusing on environmental protection.

*Recommended: 1. A set of six black-and-white postcards of Tai O in the 1960s, HK\$ 20; 2. *Tai O — Love Stories of the Fishing Village* (including tourist map) written by Wong Wai King, HK\$ 90 (original price: \$150).



scenery of Tai O. Miss Chung, the owner, introduced the places and past events in the pictures to me. Her shop actively promotes the local culture of Tai O. Some media organisations have also reported on and filmed or taken photos of wedding ceremonies and other festivities of this water-land. I saw Miss Chung in one photo, acting as a bride in a mock wedding ceremony typical of a water family.

As I listened patiently to every story she told, it seemed as if we had known each other for years. However, she had not actually been raised in Tai O. She had returned to Hong Kong from England a few years before and decided to make her home in Tai O because she loved the social environment here. Although her experience was different from the way she had lived before, she understood the importance of devoting oneself to the community. Hence, she actively participated in every sort of activity. She even learnt Guangdong opera by studying with a local master.

After we had talked for nearly two hours, some residents came to visit Miss Chung. They included housewives, lovely children who came to buy second hand toys ("Aunt, what can I buy with two dollars?"), and men discussing the future of Guangdong opera, etc. Later, I was told that Miss Chung was president of the parent-teacher club of Tai O Wing Chor School. Reading the school newsletter she gave me, I quickly understood how seriously the Tai O people protected and respected their culture. One of the most impressive activities is a

special study on Tai O organised by the centre. I really admire the pupils who leave their classrooms to study the environment, facilities, special products, living standards and further development of Tai O, under the guidance of their teachers. The

project consisted of the following: a one-day tour of Tai O, visits to mangroves and stilt-houses, a field trip to a salt field, interviews with fishermen, touring a shrimp paste factory, etc.

If every Hong Kong person were to develop a similar sense of belonging to society, perhaps we could organise a similar study of Hong Kong in the future.



1. The Tai O Culture Workshop has been established by enthusiastic local residents. Visitors can obtain ample information about Tai O there. (by Keith Lee)
2. The workshop is located in an ancient building.
3. Some fishing instruments exhibited in the workshop.
4. Children feeding the fish at Sun Ki Pang.
5. The higgledy-piggledy jumble of fishermen's stilt-houses have all the components of the dream houses of city dwellers: two storeys, balcony, sea view and private boat. (by Keith Lee)



Recalling Past Memories

With Miss Wong's book tucked under my arm, I started my trip again at the Tai O Pier. The first thing I saw was the remarkable **Old Tai O Police Station**. Constructed in 1902 and closed in 1997, it is the oldest British structure of Victorian style on Lantau Island. The sight of salted fish being sunned nearby created a funny contrast with this relic of the British Empire.

Passing Market Street, I came upon **Kwan Tai Temple**. Built in the Ming Dynasty in 1488, it is the oldest temple in Tai O. On June 24 of the lunar calendar, pilgrims come here from all over to celebrate the birthday of Kwan Tai. There is also a Tin Hau (Goddess of the Sea) Temple, a Hung Sing Shrine, and a Yeung Hau Temple. From the number of temples alone, one realises the high respect Tai O enjoys among the locals.

The 2,000-square-foot area in front of Kwan Tai Temple is commonly known as "**the park**". While there are normally few visitors during the week, all celebrations are held here at festival times. In the 1920s, many artists from other areas came here to perform. Young female singers and monkey shows were just a few of the long-standing performances. Today, the lantern fair of the Lunar New Year, an opera performance held during the Dragon Boat Festival, and celebrations for the Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as puppet shows, still take place here.

Stilt-Houses in Sun Ki Street

I walked on to Kut Hing Back Street after leaving "the park". The street was a ship-building centre in the 1970s. As demand for ship-making declined, the rise of smaller industries ensured ample employment for Tai O residents until the early 1980s.

Crossing the Sun Ki Bridge built in 1979, I came to "**Sun Ki Pang**". Stilt-houses dot the coast. Sun Ki Pang, Kut Hing Back Street Pang, Sha Tsai Min, and Tai Chung Pang were all built at a later stage in Tai O's development. The earliest stilt-houses are found in Yat Chung, Yi Chung, and Sam Chung (Areas One, Two and Three of the stilt-houses).



About 200 years ago, fishermen started to erect houses in Wing On Street and Tai Ping Street. In order to make dismantling easy, the houses were very simple at the beginning, seemingly as temporary as opera sets, which were built on stilts. Hence, the name, "stilt-houses". Originally, the structures incorporated gigantic palm-leaves for the roof, wooden boards for walls and stone pillars sunk into the riverbed for the foundation of the house. In the 1960s, building materials and the design of stilt-houses were both improved: tin plate was used for the walls; charcoal-coloured "kwan din" wood took the place of the stone pillars; the rounded or slanted roof was replaced by a flat one; single-storey houses were converted to two-storeys; and, both porch-like ends of the houses were expanded to provide more space for resting, sunning salted fish, or berthing the fishing boats.

Although these houses, in their higgledy-piggledy jumble, do not appear to have been built according to any plan, they contain all the components of a dream house for an urbanite like me: balcony, sea view, boat, even air-conditioning and a colour TV set.

The Once-Brilliant Salt Field

After touring Sun Ki Street, you see the former site of the salt fields near a hill. It was abandoned after salt production was terminated in the 1950s. Salt fields first appeared during the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong. The fields were mainly operated by people from Haifeng and Shanwei, two cities in eastern Guangdong Province. In its prime, the salt field covered two-thirds of Tai O. Because it had the advantage of water transport and salt was a necessity of the people, Tai O became one of the main places producing salt for the mainland.

During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, a sea wall or salt dam, which the locals used to call "**tai bok**" (big embankment), 800 feet long, 50 feet wide and 10 feet high, was built. It mainly prevented the salt fields, the property of the locals, from being flooded by sea






Historical Sites Abound

dilapidated stone house. Atop its left and right gates are Chinese characters meaning "house of convenience for males or females". Thanks to my trusty "guidebook", I learnt that this "house of convenience" had been constructed by Madam Yip Sin-hoi in 1934 to provide a place for lonely, old, ill and sometimes dying people to spend the remaining days of their lives.

Moving on along a path, I reached the **North Hill Tablet** erected in 1902. It was the most representative of the markers which denoted where a fisherman could and could not ply his trade. Opposite this was the **Yeung Hau Old Temple** built in the 38th year of the reign of Qing Emperor Kangxi (1699) to worship Yeung Leung Jik, a famous general of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). On the sixth day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar, the birth date

To my surprise, I learned much more than I had expected to in just this half-day tour of Tai O. If I had had more time, I would have visited the Tai O mangroves, the Tin Hau Temple beside the former site of the salt fields, the Secret Garden in Lung Tsai hidden behind Leung Uk Tsuen, as well as the 100-year-old Hip Wo School on Tai Ping Street. These are treasures to explore on my next trip. 

Translated by Kristy Wong



1. Stilt-houses built before 1960 had rounded or angled roofs.
2. Whenever there are festivals, temples in Tai O sponsor jubilant activities such as Guangdong opera and lucky firecracker competition to set off later on.
3. A section of mangroves in Tai O provides an ideal habitat for various birds and fish. (by Keith Lee)
4. Workers from Haifeng sunning salt in the salt fields in the 1950s.
5. The “house of convenience” built by Miss Yip for the elderly. (Black-and-white photos from *Tai O — Love Stories of the Fishing Village*)



Travel Tips

Tai O in brief:

Located in southwestern Lantau, Hong Kong's biggest outlying island, Tai O is surrounded by hills on three sides in a beautiful natural setting. In the past, it was a prosperous fishing village, as well as a major place where salt was mass-produced. Today, special products like salted fish and shrimp paste can still be found. The fishing village culture and still-houses attract many tourists, winning Tai O its reputation as "Venice in Hong Kong".

Warning:

- Take the MTR to Hung Cheung Station. Take exit "A", then board bus No. 11 to Tai O. Duration: 45 minutes;
- Take a ferry from Central Ferry Pier to Mui Wo Pier on Lantau Island. Then, take bus no. 1 to Tai O. Duration: 50 minutes;
- Take a fast ferry from Tuen Mun Pier to Tai O (via Sha Lo Wah). Duration: 50 minutes;

JUNE



Now — June 15

More than 140 retailers, from the food, hotel, entertainment, shopping and transport industries, will provide comprehensive offers to all tourists arriving on Cathay Pacific Airways between April 20 and June 14. A **"Guest Privilege"** booklet can be redeemed at the Hong Kong International Airport. Besides, the **"Mega Hong Kong Sale"** will also be launched on June 15.

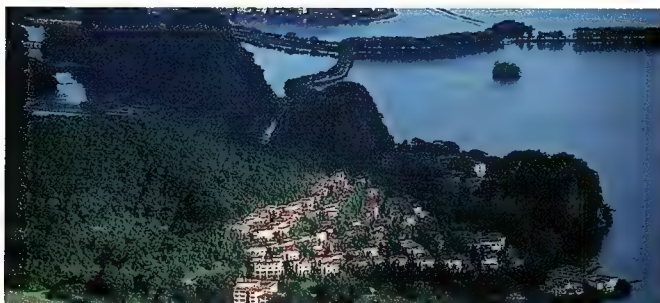
Now — June 15

A competition on Buddhist culture via paintings, couplets and calligraphy is currently being held in Zhejiang Province. The event has been organised by the China Charity Association, China Religious Study Society and Mount Tianmu. Participants can submit their works to the above organisations before June 15. The results will be revealed on July 12.



June 1-5

During the **First Zhaoqing International Tourist and Cultural Festival**, about 95 international and national travel agencies and television stations from 30 famous tourist cities in China will be invited. They will investigate and gather news on the eight top tourist routes in the Guangdong city Zhaoqing, covering the local ecological system, leisure activities and forests. A dragon boat race and an Inkslab Culture Festival will also be held during the event.



June 5-8

According to statistics from the Ministry of the Information Industry, China had over 800 million IC cards in circulation by the end of October 2001. So, it's not surprising that more than 100 integrated circuit (IC) makers have registered to take part in the **5th International Fair of Smart Cards** to be held in Beijing's China International Trade Centre. The country has also decided to widely use IC cards in the banking, telecom, social security, public security, construction, taxation, customs, TV broadcasting and transportation sectors.

June 7 — Sept. 8

To celebrate the 5th anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR, an exhibition called **"Origins of Chinese Civilisation: Cultural Relics from Henan Province"** will be held at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The exhibition will feature 108 primary historical artifacts from Henan dating back from the Neolithic Age to the six Dynasties (220-589).

June 26-29

In the **10th China International Exhibition on Building and Construction Material** held in Shenzhen, big names from China, Japan, England, Canada and other countries will show their products in the exhibition. There will be seminars discussing the trends in the building and construction material industry, as well as challenges and opportunities for the industry in China since its entrance into the WTO.

June 15

Once again, here comes the **Dragon Boat Festival**. In Hong Kong, people enjoy eating leaf-wrapped sticky rice dumplings, and watching or participating in fierce dragon boat races held at various venues such as Stanley or Sha Tin. The festival commemorates the death of national hero Qu Yuan, who committed suicide by drowning himself more than 2,000 years ago to protest against the corrupt rulers of the period.



Growth of China Outbound Travel Expected in 2002

Buyers to Meet Suppliers at ITE HK



The 16th International Travel Expo Hong Kong (ITE HK 2002) is expected to attract more Chinese buyers this year to cope with the flourishing travel market in China. "We expect the outbound travel business to enjoy substantial growth this year," "the figure may double that of last year," chiefs of the outbound travel departments of the four biggest travel tour operators in Guangdong Province told show organiser Adsale Exhibition Services Ltd. during a meeting in early March at Guangzhou.

As a well-established international travel exhibition in Hong Kong, in the vicinity of the Pearl River Delta Region of China, ITE HK 2002 is receiving full support from Guangdong tour operators. They will organise buyer delegations to the show to foster new connections and explore business opportunities with worldwide travel suppliers. Representatives from the outbound travel department will also share their experience of the Guangdong outbound travel market during the show's concurrent seminars.

The four China travel tour operators, namely Guangdong China Travel Service Co. Ltd., China International Travel Service of Guangdong, GZL International Travel Service Ltd. and Guangdong Rail China Youth Travel Service (GRCYTS), handle more than 90% of Guangzhou's outbound travel and 60% of national inbound travel.

In addition to buyers from Guangdong Province, the organiser has

also received numerous buyer registration applications from major provinces all over China. After the applicants are screened by the organiser, nearly 100 hosted Chinese buyers will be invited to visit the show.



Last year, the show attracted more than 6,000 international buyers and trade visitors. Apart from Chinese buyers, buyer delegations from Korea, Thailand, Singapore, India and Taiwan have already registered to join the show. Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and other Asian countries are also planning buyer delegations. To date, about 350 overseas tour operators from 33 countries and regions have submitted their registration applications.

To facilitate communications between exhibitors and buyers, the organiser is arranging concurrent seminars, on-site product presentations and breakfast meetings for target groups. A "Buyers Meet Sellers" Session will also be held on the first day of the show to facilitate business discussions.



ITE HK 2002 will be held from May 19 - June 7, 2002 at the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. For additional information, please contact Adsale Exhibition Services Ltd.

Tel: (852) 2516 1097
Fax: (852) 2516 1024
E-mail: info@adsale.com.hk
Website: <http://www.itehk.com>
Add: 1/F, Sandring House, 744 King's Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2516 1097
Fax: (852) 2516 1024
E-mail: post@adsale.com.hk

Taihu: Vast Expanse of Water

Photos by Zhou Rende, Que Ruiming, Xie Xinfu Article by Xiao Ying, Edited by Chu Kit

Some say cloudiness can be a kind of obscure beauty. Taihu Lake, to the south of the Yangtse River, exhibits just this sort of veiled comeliness. Though massive, the lake possesses an ethereal charm which lures visitors from every corner of the world.



Big evergreens and graceful willows flutter in the gentle breeze on the banks of Taihu Lake in Suzhou. Cloaked in a light fog, the elegant sails, wispy winds and dancing leaves merge into a peculiar symphony.







*F*ishing boat sails silhouetted against the sunset. The afterglow turns from deep red to bright red, then from bright red to a violet hue to be replaced by solemn darkness.



In the Eastern and Western Hills by Taihu Lake, one finds numerous buildings and courtyards built in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Standing by the entrances of the local villages are thousand-year-old camphor trees, seeming to greet visitors from afar....



Tips about Taihu

Covering more than 2,400 square kilometres, Taihu Lake is one of five major freshwater lakes in China and a key scenic area of the country. In Suzhou, there are many places from which to enjoy the lake view. Among the best known ones are the Eastern Hill (Dongshan), Western Hill (Xishan) and Guangfu Town. In addition, the scenery of Lingyan Hill and Tianping Hill nearby is also refined. In Wuxi, famous scenic spots by the lake include Yuantouzhu, Longtouzhu, the Wuxi CCTV Film & TV City, Liyuan Garden and the Big Buddha of Lingshan Hill.

Transport

- **Eastern Hill:** Take Bus No. 20 from downtown Suzhou
- **Western Hill:** Take a special-line bus from the Bus Station in Wuxian County, Suzhou
- **Ancient Guangfu Town:** Take a bus from the South Bus Station in Suzhou or the Bus Station of Wuxian County
- **Lingyan Hill:** Take Bus No. 16 from downtown Suzhou
- **Tianping Hill:** Same as for Lingyan Hill
- **Wuxi:** At the Wuxi Railway Station, there are public buses to the various scenic spots mentioned above



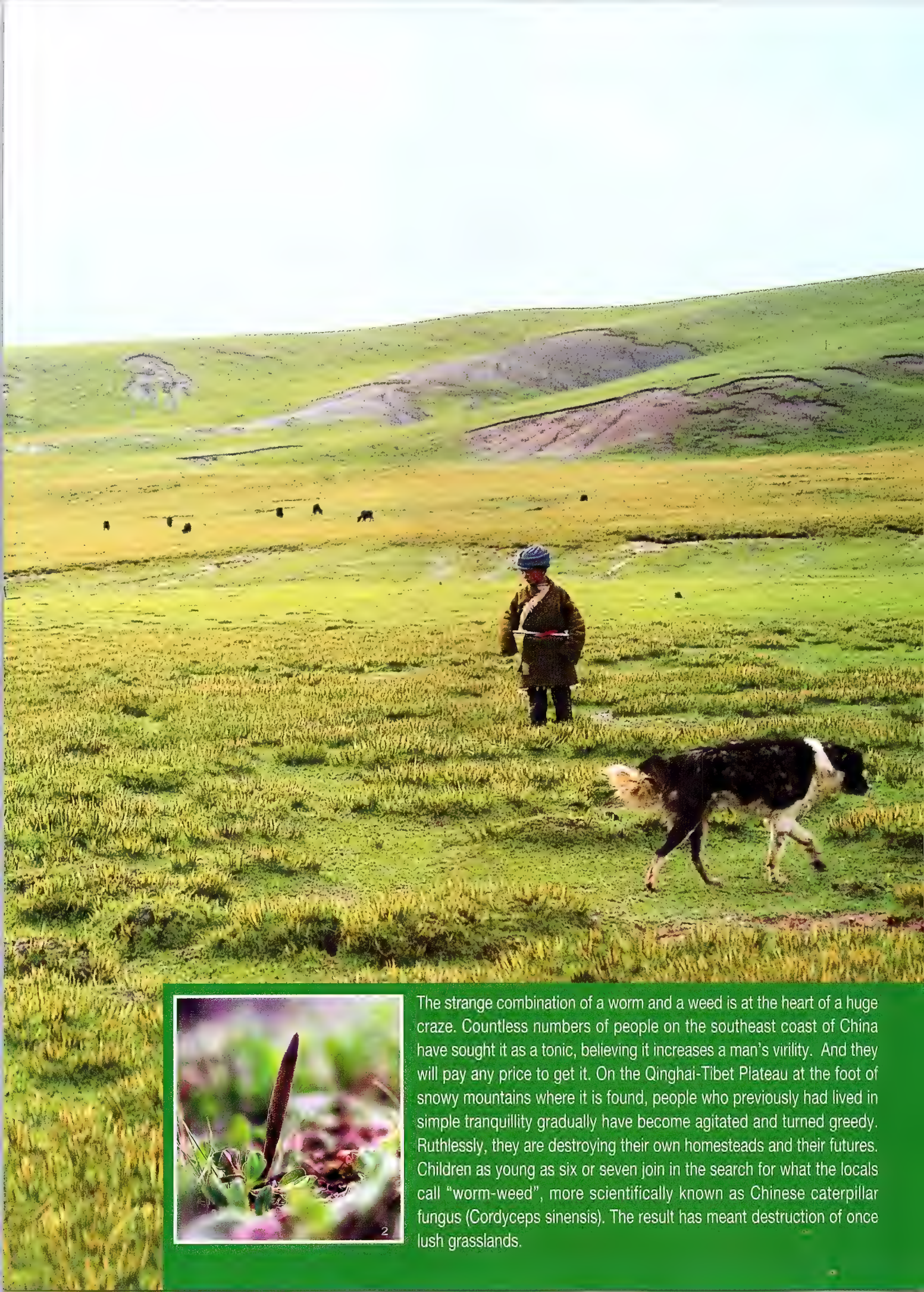
NATURE

WHO IS DESTROYING THE GRASSLAND?

— *Thoughts on Chinese Caterpillar Fungi*

Photos by Zheng Ligang Article by Zheng Ligang, Li Wu





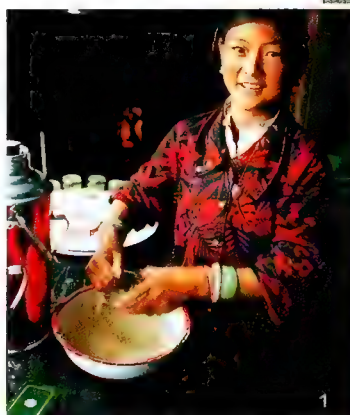
The strange combination of a worm and a weed is at the heart of a huge craze. Countless numbers of people on the southeast coast of China have sought it as a tonic, believing it increases a man's virility. And they will pay any price to get it. On the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau at the foot of snowy mountains where it is found, people who previously had lived in simple tranquillity gradually have become agitated and turned greedy. Ruthlessly, they are destroying their own homesteads and their futures. Children as young as six or seven join in the search for what the locals call "worm-weed", more scientifically known as Chinese caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*). The result has meant destruction of once lush grasslands.

Long, long ago, when people living along the southeast coast first heard of a creature on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau that was a worm in winter and a weed in summer, their eyes grew wide. Who could believe such a thing? During our journey to Tibet, we happened to meet two Canadian professors of medicine. They saw and even touched some Chinese caterpillar fungus, but insisted that tales of its dual existence had no scientific basis. How could something be a plant and a worm at the same time?

Zhuoma, No Longer the Girl I Knew

We set off from Lhasa, went along the Yarlung Tsangpo River and entered the basin area of Shanyuan Lake in South Tibet. Then we headed east along the Himalayas and entered the mountainous area of East Tibet, finally arriving at the plateau of North Tibet. This route passed through areas where Chinese caterpillar fungus grows.

From Bayi Town we then entered the Southern Sichuan-Tibet Highway. Nyinchi and Bomi were beautiful places. Pine woods, lakes, rivers and snowy mountains are concentrated along this route, including one of the best places to see, Rawu Lake. A year before, I had driven to this lake. The lunch I had then in a small eatery left a deep impression on me. The waitress was a 13-year-old girl called Zhuoma. She did all sorts of work, fetching water, washing out the cooking pot, sweeping the floor, etc. She had a serene expression and a very quiet manner. When asked a question, she would just smile. Before I left, I took a photo of her washing up bowls and plates. This time, I wanted to give her the photo.



The restaurant's owner, Sister Cui, had gone home to Henan, leaving the management to her younger sister, Little Cui. She said, "My sister told me about you. Zhuoma has left here. She's up in the mountains digging up worm-weeds. She's working hard, up early and works until night. She has sharp eyes and can find more than any adult. A day's work fetches her over a hundred yuan. During the 20-day digging season, she earns a lot more than she would here."

The sun was sinking in the west. Rawu Lake was still very quiet, gleaming with ripples. A group of kids who had just come down the mountain rushed into the restaurant, each holding a cigarette packet which, I was told, contained Chinese caterpillar fungi. "How old are you?" I asked one of them. "Seven." "Do you know where Zhuoma is?" "Still up in the mountain." I told the kids to let Zhuoma know that I wanted to see her the next morning in the restaurant.

We got there before daybreak. Zhuoma was waiting for us. She had changed a great deal. As soon as she got the photo and before she had taken a good look, she turned to head for the mountain. She

joined a stream of people on their way to dig up worm-weeds and soon disappeared from sight. Sadness gripped my heart.

Freshness Matters

Our jeep struggled through the Anjiula Mountains. Early sunlight touched the mountain tops. Endless numbers of Tibetan people were clustered along the roadsides. Among them were some teenagers. Whenever our jeep passed a crowd of them, we would hear, "Worm-weeds! Worm-weeds! Do you want any?" We drove along the Lengqu River to the Baima (White Horse) Town of Baxoi. As we waited for lunch in a small restaurant, an elderly Tibetan man fished out a package of Chinese caterpillar fungi, which I guessed must



have weighed half a kilogramme. He said that he had dug them up the previous year and would like to sell them for five yuan a piece. Then he produced more than 20 fresh ones, asking six yuan each. When I asked him why there were not many fresh ones available, he said, "The yield is small this year. The stuff in the market was mostly collected last year."

A friend of mine told me a story a dozen years ago. He had been to a village in Xikang, Sichuan, for a visit. While there, he asked the local Tibetans if they themselves ate Chinese caterpillar fungi. They did not. "It is not as effective as you Han Chinese think. It has no medicinal effect at all after two years' time." He was then led to a warehouse filled with tons of Chinese caterpillar fungi. "Fifty cents a catty. Would you like some?" one offered. They had been lying there



for several years. People at that time were rather honest and simple. But today, one has to be careful.

First Sight of Chinese Caterpillar Fungus

Having left Baxoi, we entered the gorge of the Nujiang River. Then we crossed Yela Mountain, 4,621 metres above sea level, passed the grassland in Bamda and reached Qamdo. Qamdo started a Chinese caterpillar fungi processing factory in 1979. During our visit, production was suspended as all the workers had gone out to purchase fungi.

Out of Qamdo, we headed west, passing Riwoqê to arrive in Dongle Village in Dêngqên, in the evening. We set up our tents by a small river outside the village. On one side of the river, there towered a row of high, rocky cliffs laced with snow. A shepherd told me that the mountains here teemed with worm-weeds. People were busily digging them up right then. I crossed the river and climbed up the slope. It did not look very high but it was difficult to climb. My hand-held altimeter indicated that I was already 4,400 metres above sea level. I came across a tent and seven or eight young people all searching for Chinese caterpillar fungi. Two of them volunteered to take us to see where the worm-weeds were hiding.

With great effort, we finally climbed up to that point. At last I saw the strange creature, 4,500 metres above sea level. It looked to me like a small Chinese brush at a height of 3-4 cm. I took a little spade from one of the young men and cut into the earth around the gray fungus, removing the tiny weeds around it. I dug up the lump of earth, removed the soil and finally the worm-weed was released. Carefully, I removed the gauze-like covering to reveal a little brown worm. Similar to a silkworm in shape, the fungus was like a bean shoot sticking out of the head of the worm. It was larger towards the top, like a baseball bat. My first thought was that it was a worm, not a weed. I gave it a gentle squeeze and found it rather hard, not soft

like a silkworm. So this was the creature — a worm in winter and a weed in summer — caterpillar fungus.

The World's Most Unfair Union

Biologists call this phenomena "Concerted Evolution". I first heard this term when I talked to Dr. Zhang in the Shenzhen Botanical Garden. According to him, Chinese caterpillar fungus is unique. The little stick growing out of the head of the worm is a kind of fungus known as *Cordyceps sinensis*. The worm itself is a larva of the *Hepialus varians* staudinger's moth. In autumn, the moths deposit their eggs on grassy land near the snow line in the mountains. The eggs turn into larvae. After the larvae slough off their outer covering three times, the weather turns cold. Then the worms bore about 10 cm into the earth for warmth and to hibernate, unaware that they may never come out again.

For as the larva grows, sporangium on the fungus matures, releasing countless, invisible spores which ride the wind to spread far and wide. Some fall on the larva's body. After the larva burrows into the earth, spores germinate on and grow out of its skin in string-like shapes of fungus. The body of the worm is gradually covered with these strings until it becomes encased in fungus. By this time,

Previous page:

1. People ignore the consequences of their digging. What will sheep and cattle eat in future? Such shortsightedness will cost us dearly.
2. A little stick resembling a small Chinese brush; this is the fungus of a worm-weed.

This page:

1. Only a year ago, Zhuoma was a lovely girl. Now she is consumed by the wave of digging up Chinese caterpillar fungi.
2. The vegetation upon which people and livestock rely is suffering from desertification.
3. Young folk crawl on the ground, scrutinizing every inch of land in search of the Chinese caterpillar fungi.
4. The route running from the valleys of South Tibet to the mountains and canyons of East Tibet and the North Tibet plateau teems with Chinese caterpillar fungi.

the worm has died. In early summer, snow on the mountains begins to melt. Fungus then starts to grow out of the head of the dead worm and sprouts out of the earth. The reproductive organ is formed at its top. When the spores mature, they repeat the cycle, carried by the wind to look for a new "colony".

Dr. Zhang said that such concerted evolution was an unfair union. If a larva is free of spores, it will safely pass the winter and develop into a pupa. In spring, a moth will emerge from the pupa, fly off to deposit its eggs and thus complete its life's purpose.

Conversely, if mature spores do not come to rest on the larva, the spores are useless. They might form fungus threads in the earth but they will never grow into the string-like fungus or reproduce; they simply die. In other words, if the larvae and the spores never met, such a magical creature would never exist.

Searching Everywhere for Worm-Weeds

After that, I often followed those looking for worm-weeds and tried to find out what was on their minds. Every one of them was anxious for a bonanza. To dig up a single worm-weed, they carelessly wielded a hoe and turned over a large piece of earth. Worm-weeds often grow in a concentrated manner, and sometimes 20 to 30 worm-weeds grow within one square metre of ground. If one was discovered, the entire area around it was turned up. Even nearby shrubbery was uprooted. Any suitable place for worm-weed was completely searched without regard for the consequences, including pastureland beneath the snow line. Digging at such a scale thoroughly jeopardised the ecological environment and the spreading of *Cordyceps sinensis* spores. No spores would mean no more worm-weeds.

Sog Xian County is known as the "County of Worm-Weeds". Only when I got there, did I begin to understand the economic power



of those little creatures. The county was said to have developed on the strength of worm-weeds alone. New buildings towered in the county seat, elegant and magnificent. No county seat I had passed during the trip could match this one. It was raining heavily as we pulled into town so it was impossible to pitch our tents in the fields. We decided to check into the hostel of the county government. We learned that the manager and most of the hostel employees had gone off to search for worm-weeds. The building was virtually empty. After supper, we sauntered along the street but were frequently stopped by people selling Chinese caterpillar fungus. They took you for a

merchant and even invited you to their homes to see "the goods". I wanted to take some photos but they refused until I bought a package. The young Tibetan man I bought from was very excited. When I asked where he had found them, he replied, "Far, far away. It takes a whole day to get there." He had not expected to find more than 60 worm-weeds in one day and he sold them all as soon as he got back. He said that he knew another remote place teeming with worm-weeds and was going there the next day.

We left Sog Xian County and headed for Nagqu. Along the way, we often came across groups of young Tibetan people, each toting a long, curved steel tool at his or her side, or a little hoe or spade. Even the kids had some kind of implement. On our way to Tianhu, we stopped and camped on a pastureland not far from the county seat of Damxung. Soon, people arrived hawking Chinese caterpillar fungi. Kids were the first to offer their fare. They said nothing but held up their goods, trying to catch our attention. If you bought from one person, all the others swarmed around you.

Heaven's "Punishment"

However, what we heard in Namco was rather unexpected. As soon as we pulled up, a group of kids rushed towards us. I thought they would try to sell us more worm-weeds, but I was wrong. They



were just curious to see outsiders. When I asked an elderly man if they had any worm-weeds, he said no. We asked, "Why not?" His reply was surprising. "It is wrong to dig up worm-weeds. Worm-weeds are gods of the grassland. Digging only damages pastureland. Sheep and cattle would die of starvation. The heavy snow we had a few years ago was a punishment meted out by the gods for digging up worm-weeds." His words were so different from what I had seen and heard over the past few days.

I asked our driver about the snowstorm. He said that a few years back, an extremely heavy snow fell in northern Tibet. The waist-high drifts enveloped the whole grassland and didn't melt for a long time. One million head of sheep and cattle froze to death or died of starvation.

Chinese caterpillar fungi primarily grow in the area of Jiangyuan on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. I climbed up those mountains and saw with my own eyes how completely the vegetation had been ravaged by humans. Formerly clean streams ran muddy, washing away fertile soil into the sources of mighty rivers.

The digging up of Chinese caterpillar fungi is concentrated in just 20 days between late spring and early summer, because the fungus grows at the same time that weeds sprout. Only when they emerge from the ground can people see them. After another 15 to 20 days, the sporangium on the fungus matures and keeps absorbing nutrition from the body of the worm. Once the spores mature, the worm carcass has no medicinal effect.

The Rarer It Is, the More People Want It

In Shenzhen, I visited Professor Li, a biologist who has been studying highland plants in Kunming, Sichuan and Tibet for years. According to her, Chinese caterpillar fungus is not something people dig up anytime. The digging period occurs when it is most nutritious and most effective as a medicine. But in that time period, its sporangium has only just begun to grow and the spores are not yet mature. If they are dug up in large numbers before they complete



3

their reproductive function, the number of mature spores will inevitably decrease. Furthermore, the chance of spores attaching themselves to worms is very low. Worse still, the ecology around the snow line has been ruined on a large scale, directly affecting the existence and reproduction of the *Hepialus varians staudingeri*. These factors have led to recent large drops in Chinese caterpillar fungi harvests year after year. If this continues unabated, Chinese caterpillar fungi will die out, too.

In 1998, a single Chinese caterpillar fungus in Nagqu sold at a price of 1.5 to 2.5 yuan. By the year 2000, the price had risen to 4 to 6 yuan. Nowadays in Guangzhou or Shenzhen a Chinese caterpillar fungus easily sells for 20 to 30 yuan. The price shoots to more than \$HK20,000 for a half kilogramme!

High profits, superstition and legends about the fungus in developed areas along the southeast coast have made the Chinese caterpillar fungus an "elixir". The truth is, it is already on the verge of extinction! Meanwhile, ignorance and greed are accelerating the desertification of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

©

Translated by Wang Mingjie

1. Tibetans are pious Buddhists.
2. Grassland is essential to herdsmen. If the grassland is destroyed, not only will Chinese caterpillar fungi become extinct, but sheep and cattle will also disappear.
3. Consumer demand has resulted in the destruction of the Tibetan grassland.
4. Chinese caterpillar fungi are made into delicacies in restaurants.

What Is Chinese Caterpillar Fungus?

Chinese Caterpillar Fungus is deemed a precious medicine in the Chinese Pharmacopoeia. It is regarded as one of the three great medicines, the other two being pilose antler and ginseng.

It is the fungus of *Cordyceps sinensis* (Berk.) Sacc. of the Hypercreaceae family growing on the larva of the *Hepialus varians staudingeri* of the Hepialidae family. A mature Chinese caterpillar fungus is shaped like a baseball bat and is 4 to 11 cm in length. It is dark brown on the outside and white inside.

The Chinese Pharmacopoeia states: *Cordyceps* is sweet in taste and warm in nature. *Cordyceps* can nourish the kidneys and lungs, stop bleeding, resolve phlegm and control cough and asthma, and treat impotence, low semen emission, and soreness and pain in the waist and knee. According to modern medical analysis, the proteins in *cordyceps* are composed of 19 amino acids. The drug also contains fat, coarse fibres, carbohydrates, several vitamins, and polysaccharide inorganic elements. It helps increase immunity and protects the myocardium from attacks of hypoxia. It also has an antibiotic function and can inhibit the growth of cancer cells.

In China, Chinese caterpillar fungus grows primarily in Sichuan, Tibet, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Gansu, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. It grows on grassy slopes where the snow line of mountains and pasture lands meet, where it is cold, shady and moist and the soil is soft and fertile. It has been discovered in 43 counties in Tibet, and is especially prevalent in Nagqu and Qamdo. Chinese caterpillar fungus produced in Tibet is regarded as the best of all such fungus. It is bright brown and plump. The fungus is short and sturdy.

It is said that in China, the larvae of 15 worms may grow weeds. But only the Chinese caterpillar fungus has medical value. Recently, an article on the Internet indicated that it has been bred artificially in China's Shanxi and Liaoning provinces and Japan. However, because these are cultivated from silkworms, tussah and other moths' eggs and are nurtured at a normal temperature and at low altitudes, they are thought to be of inferior quality and have been rejected by customers.

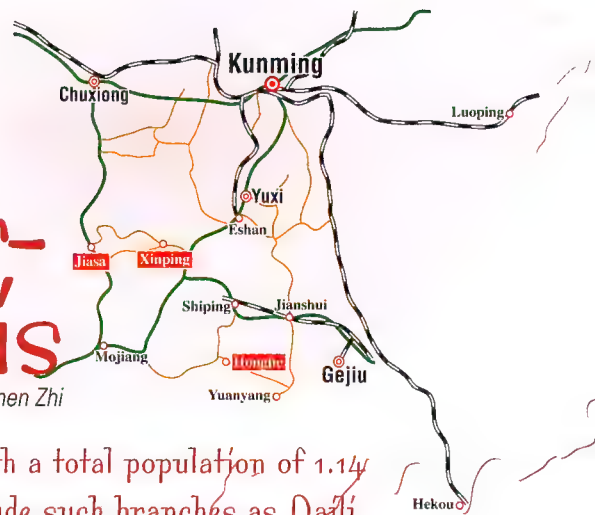






The Resplendent Flower-Waist Dais

Photos by Shao Zibo and Liu Jianhua Article by Shen Zhi



The Dais are a native minority ethnic group in Yunnan, with a total population of 1.14 million. Living in river valleys and nearby meadows, they include such branches as Dai, Daina and Daiya. With their own written and spoken language, belief system, clothing and ornaments, the Dais earn a living by breeding buffalo and growing rice. Hence their name, meaning "an ethnic group of the water."

Woven Bamboo Hats, Baskets and Purses

Each of the major branches of the Dais is further divided into sub-branches. According to their clothing and ornaments, the Dais can be divided into black Dais, white Dais and flower-waist Dais. Generally speaking, Dai and Daina are white Dais while the Daiya consist of black Dais and flower-waist Dais. Xiping County in Yuxi is one of the main places where flower-waist Dais live in compact communities.

Walking through flower-waist Dai villages in Honghe, Mosha and Jiasa, we were fascinated by the woven bamboo hats that the womenfolk wore as well as the

bamboo baskets and purses round their waists. As large as washing basins, the bamboo hats sat forward atop their already high, richly decorated hairdos, resembling a blooming wild cockscomb. The square bamboo baskets and flat and round bamboo purses are used by the women to carry things in when they go out, much as women in cities use handbags. The difference lies in size and function. The baskets are used to carry belongings and tools, while the purses carry money for shopping and can hold the fish and snails they collect

while working in the rice fields. The hats, baskets and purses are made by men, who usually present them to their sweethearts as gifts. No wonder the women never part with them when they are out, perhaps using them to display their happiness. Although the Mosha and Jiasa townships are near one another, the residents of each wear different clothes and ornaments. People in Mosha Township pay particular attention to the



1. The clothing of flower-waist Dais is mainly black and red. The Dais wear various gold and silver ornaments, including bracelets, rings and waist decorations. Silver ornaments are indispensable for any Dai girl. (by Liu Jianhua)
2. Dai women expertly weave colourful threads into flowery sashes. Each one has a different pattern. (by Liu Jianhua)
3. Apart from being the "Valentine's Day" for flower-waist Dais, the Huajie Festival is also a good opportunity for Dai villagers to make money. (by Shao Zibo)
4. Even when working in the fields, Dai women adorn themselves carefully. (by Liu Jianhua)



1. The straw hat specially made for the "yamen". Forming a complete set with the black fan, its top and brim are embroidered with repeating circular patterns. (by Shao Zibo)
2. In Xiping County, Dai women wear a "high bun" at the back of the head. Bound with brightly coloured sashes or thread, the bun is adorned with silver trinkets and sometimes even peacock plumes. (by Liu Jianhua)
3. After the sacrifice to the tree god, a "yamen" enjoys a picnic with the villagers. (by Shao Zibo)
4. Dai men also wear embroidered sashes on their heads. They weave bamboo baskets and purses for their sweethearts with great care. (by Shao Zib)

bowls and upturned rims of their hats while in Jiasa the hats are cone-shaped. In Mosha, baskets and purses are round, but in Jiasa they are square.

The flower-waist Dais are good at knitting belts and sashes, and they wear clothes of home-made, indigo-dyed fabric. Usually, they wear a hat with a high crown entwined with colourful cloth, a collarless short jacket, and a long skirt. They also wear an undergarment which buttons up on the side. All the edges of the jacket, skirt and undergarment are embroidered with brocade belts of different colours. The most important is the part around the waist, which is decorated with at least three belts about a metre each in length.

One belt is used to tie up the skirt, while the other two go around the waist above and below the navel. Hence, the name "flower-waist" Dais.

At festival times, the flower-waist Dais adorn themselves even more beautifully. On the 13th day of lunar January, the Huajie (Flower Street) Festival is observed. When the time comes, the womenfolk carefully attire themselves in order to catch the attention of the males. "Huajie" Festival is a Han Chinese translation. In Dai language, the holiday is called "Hun gong

na ai". It is somewhat similar to the western "Valentine's Day". Here, "na" means "to take for one's self" and "ai" means lovely young girls. That day, beautifully dressed girls of the flower-waist Dais crowd the street. Most of them decorate the collars, lapels and waist belt of their garments with silver bells featuring patterns of tall mountains and running streams. Some even wear brightly-coloured silk clothing. They do all this to display themselves at their very best. At the same time, they take the opportunity to choose who they want to date.

The three-day festival now offers an opportunity for the villagers to earn money. During the festival, every family is busy day and night, slaughtering chickens and oxen, making rice flour and thin rice noodles, preparing hotpot, erecting sheds....

Protection of the Tree God to Ward Off Flood

"Echu" is a transliteration of a Dai term. Here, "e" means sacrifice and "chu" means "big tree". Together, they mean "making a sacrifice to the big tree." For different minority ethnic groups in Yunnan, "making a sacrifice to the tree" has variant meanings. The Hani people make such sacrifices because they view the tree as the source of



Lesser Huajie (Flower Street), Greater Huajie

January 13th of the lunar calendar is the "Lesser Huajie" for the flower-waist Dais. Dai girls bedeck themselves in their festive best, donning silver bracelets, earrings, chains and bells. They collect their meticulously-crafted clothes, skirts, flowery sashes, fragrant pouches and embroidered kerchiefs in a woven bamboo basket and put on their woven bamboo hats. Then, they gather on the street. There, they take out all the things and spread them out in an orderly fashion, waiting for their sweethearts to come. While playing flutes, the young men wander around, looking for their ideal spouse. If a young man finds someone he likes, he approaches her, takes her pouch or kerchief and then leaves. The girl then gathers up her belongings and follows him to a place where they can profess their feelings. Upon parting, the girl accepts a silver ornament from the young man. The silver ornament and the pouch or kerchief then become items of betrothal. May 6th of the lunar calendar is called the "Greater Huajie". On this day, the young man and woman tell their parents about one other. Usually, the parents have no objections and they decide an auspicious date for the wedding.



water and fertility. Having well-tended trees means retaining the source of all life. The Yi people regard the tree as the source of fire which can drive away darkness and bring light to mankind. For the Dais, trees play an important part in stabilising the riverbanks and preventing flood, so it is imperative that they seek help from the tree god.

During our visit, we chanced upon an "echu." In Yunnan, each ethnic group has its own particular name for the people presiding over the sacrifices: "mopi" for the Hanis, "bimo" for the Yis and "yamen" for the flower-waist Dais (or "yamo" in Mosha Township). The one we saw wore a long, flowing silver gown and a loose silver garment, called "beima" by Han Chinese. Wearing a straw hat and carrying a black fan, he sat behind a long table chanting with his head slightly lowered. Although I sat beside him and listened for two hours, I never understood a word he spoke. The top and brim of his hat were embroidered with many circular patterns in black and red woolen thread. Then, the villagers came, carrying some thin bamboo sticks on top of which were "nets" made of bamboo strips. Hanging from the nets there were chains,



also made of bamboo strips, with celery and fennel tied to them at the bottom. The bamboo sticks were placed on the ground under the tree. Called "bengshe" in Dai language, they would catch the good fortune bestowed by the tree god. After the ceremony, the villagers took these bamboo sticks back and placed them in front of their doors, in the planted fields or in the granaries, in hopes that their family would have good luck.

Apart from presiding over the ceremony, that day the "yamen" also performed "meimei" for the Dai families, calling back the wandering souls of the deceased by tying knots with red thread. Finally, everyone sat



Various Bun Hair Styles

Old and young, all women of the flower-waist Dais wear their hair in a bun. Dai women in Xingping County (Daisha) wear the bun at the back of the head. Called a "high bun," it is usually tied up with colourful sashes or thread and adorned with silver ornaments or even peacock plumes. In Maofie and Mosha of Honghe County as well as Dong'e Township of Yuanjiang County (Daifa), the bun is usually directly on top of the head and wrapped in black cloth with flowery trim. In Dashuiping Township of Yuanjiang County, the Dai women (Daizhong) also wear the bun on top of the head. Big silver hairpins are inserted around the bun which is then covered with a black head scarf, causing the silver ornaments to appear and disappear from time to time. This style has earned them the name "big-head" flower-waist Dais.





round the big tree and enjoyed a banquet to which I was also invited.

Two-Day Funeral Ceremony

While going round Mosha one day, we heard drums, cymbals and suona being played. Following the sound, we entered an earthen-roofed house crowded with people. It turned out to be a funeral gathering. All of the deceased's family wore mourning clothes and the women, in their bright outfits, were shedding tears. By the window sat a burly man with a very solemn expression, a Dai knife at his side. Opposite him there was a makeshift bed of two pieces of timber which was covered by layers of cloth. There was no corpse. A weeping woman told us that in this area when a Dai

died the funeral was held in two stages. The first was a fire burial, the cremation of the body to send the soul up to heaven. This is called the "burial of the soul." In this family, the corpse had been cremated the day before. The second stage was the burying of the ashes in the ground. The woman said that they were waiting for the ashes which would be placed on the empty "bed".

Suddenly, firecrackers were heard popping outside. The womenfolk cried more loudly and the sombre man picked up his knife and led the women out. I started to follow them, but the woman stopped me, saying that they were going to greet people coming to offer condolences. Outside the house, I saw three or four big cooking pots

being tended which would feed everyone. After the meal, firecrackers went off again. Some people carried the bed to the door and several chickens and ducks were killed by being thrown to the ground and burned. Led again by the man with the knife, the ashes of the deceased were taken to the graveyard up the mountain.

Translated by Li Zhenguo

1. Flower-waist Dais in Mosha accompany the ashes of the dead to the graveyard to be buried. (by Shao Zibo)
2. Flower-waist Dais in Jiasa prepare offerings to the tree god. (by Shao Zibo)
3. Bengshe are used to catch the good luck bestowed by the tree god. After the ceremony, the villagers place them in front of their homes, in the fields and at granaries, for good fortune and harvest. (by Shao Zibo)



Earthen-Roof Houses

The flower-waist Dais' earthen-roof houses are mostly found on flat land. The main, oblong building is divided into three rooms. In addition to this, there are two auxiliary houses, one for the kitchen and the other for storing farming tools. The central part of the house features a skylight without glass. Ditches are dug around the walls and filled with stones until they are about 30 cm above ground. The wooden pillars of the structure's walls rest on this to keep the timber from touching the ground. The pillars and beams are linked by tenons to complete the house frame. Wooden boards are then piled upon the beams, and lengths of chopped wood or tree branches are stacked on these in turn. The next two layers are pine leaves and earth, which is packed solidly. The building is warm in winter and cool in summer as a result, and the roof can be used to sun produce from the crops. The disadvantage is the cost to forest resources. Moreover, the wood is subject to termite infestation and leaks.





Photo Shoot in Shanxi Province

Photos & article by Peter Li

Editor's note: Besides being photo buffs, both Peter and his wife Rebecca, regular readers of *China Tourism*, have a great interest in the natural and historical landscapes of their motherland. Other places in China that they have visited include Jiuzhaigou (Nine-Village Valley), Northern Xinjiang and Guizhou.

Prior to the Lunar New Year, we were planning a vacation for some much-needed relaxation and recreation. Our ideal holiday would be in a not overly-commercialised place, with plenty of photo opportunities, a fairly short flight time and the same or a nearby time zone. After some research, we decided to join an 8-day tour to Shanxi Province (a three-hour flight from Hong Kong) organised by China Tourism.

The tour was to focus on historical sites, ancient architecture, temples, an old town (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and some Chinese New Year cultural events in the evenings. I equipped myself accordingly. A highly reliable auto-focus system was the optimum choice. Flash was not a necessity, but I made an exception for this trip. Most importantly, I took along lots of extra batteries to fight the sub-zero temperatures.

During the trip, temperatures hovered around zero (below 5-10°C). We all wore gloves and several layers of clothes to keep warm, which made shooting, changing lenses and loading film a little more difficult. Extremely dry and dusty conditions meant that we had to constantly clean the lenses as well.

The first major photo session fell on Lunar New Year's Eve. Everyone waited outside the temple gate, which would not open until midnight. The local tradition was to burn incense to their gods right after midnight, in hopes to be blessed for the next 12 months. For me, this provided an opportunity for some available light photography. Unfortunately, the temple was extremely dark. I had to rely on the candlelight and/or the camera flash only. All the pictures were taken with 24/1.4L or 50/1.4 lenses, without a tripod. The lenses were opened wide (F1.4 to F1.8 range) and I used a slow shutter speed (1/4 to 1/20 of a second).



As for film, I mainly used the fairly slow, domestic ISO 100 daylight negative film on the EOS system. The resolution of slower film is simply superb and is great for enlargements. My wife used ISO 400 film in her 28Ti.



For the rest of the trip, most of the photos were shot in fine daylight. The sculptures and statues inside the temple and monastery, which were not lighted, were the only exceptions. One had to rely on natural light coming through the window and doors. Again, all the shots were handheld. If I had been using a medium format camera, I would obviously have opted for a tripod. Anyway, shooting sculpture is not a high priority for me.

I did take photographs on the landscape and from rooftops. One missing major element was snow, which would have made the pictures more interesting. The information superhighway is certainly taking off in China. The vast number of overhead wires running here and there is a nightmare for photographers, but for economists it's a reassuring sign that China's emerging market economy is in overdrive, and that a 7% GDP growth rate is not an overstatement. I wonder if the IMF shares my observation?

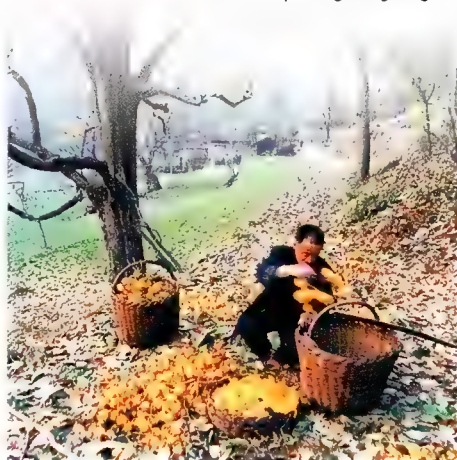
Apart from photography, the trip itself was very enjoyable. Hotel quality was very good in the major cities and adequate in the smaller towns. Heating did not pose a problem at all. Food in general was tasty, but one should not expect to find western cuisine. Good coffee was hard to come by, even in the top tier hotels, while coffee from junk food shops like McDonald's or KFC was much better.

On a technical note, it is probably best to take available light shots with a digital camera. Imagine the flexibility of an ISO 3200 and having full control over the colour temperature! However, the pro-digital format is still quite expensive at the moment.



In a Small Village Far Away

Photos & article by Yang Xingfang



In our modern world, it may be hard to imagine a place hidden in the virgin forests deep in the mountains, completely unknown to the outside world, where the villagers rise with the sun and retire at sunset, grinding flour and rice on millstones, pounding grains in stone mortars the day long, and burning firewood and oil lamps at night. A place where it would be a treat for the people to taste pork in the course of a year...

Having returned from a symposium and photo show in Hong Kong, I learned from a friend that just such place, with a wholly uncontaminated ecological system, did, in fact exist. Almost subconsciously, I found myself there six times in the short period of one month.

This mystical place is the Xiaogoubei Village in Shaoyuan Town, Jiyuan City, on the border between northwest Henan Province and southeast Shanxi Province. I made a visit there with some writers. A few days of exploring were really eye opening. The people there live modestly in a picturesque natural landscape, the vegetation and ecological system are free of human interference, and the primeval forests are just breathtaking. So warm-hearted and simple are the villagers that they always make me feel at home.

Xiaogoubei Village, a Rough Place...

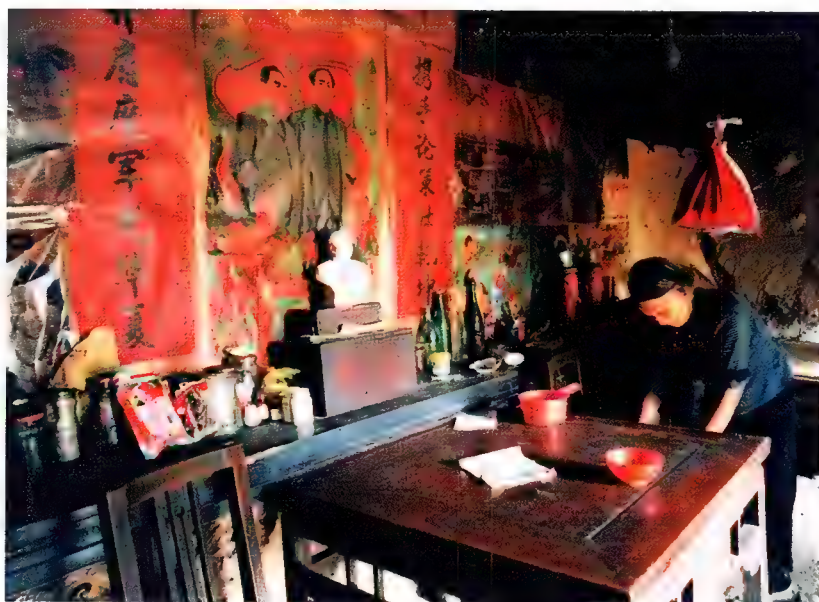
The first evening after supper, many of us chatted together by the light of an oil lamp. Mr. Li Peixian, Editor-in-Chief of the Jiyuan Daily who is a good friend of mine, asked me to talk about Hong Kong. I choked as if a lump were in my throat, and it was a while before I could speak. What could I say? Though we live on the same globe, life here was so basic and primitive, whereas Hong Kong was so prosperous and developed. It is a sharp contrast; the difference is as great as that between heaven and earth. For instance, it's hard to imagine Hong Kong without electricity. With my mixed feelings, I struggled to get into a brighter mood.

To be honest, I wanted to cry in front of them and vent my bitter feelings. We have such beautiful

scenery here, which is rare and valuable but totally hidden from the outside world. In fact, a highly-developed, modern society relies heavily on a natural

ecological environment. The two complement each other and should form a harmonious whole. Yet what I saw was like something from another world. Either the villagers seemed satisfied with simply getting enough to eat or they dreamed of leaving the place. Some of them had contracted orchards and land outside the mountains, and some had even moved to the plains areas. The population in the village had dropped from over 300 to less than 30, leaving empty houses and abandoned land. The school had closed, and the few remaining students went to school in Huangdongshu Village over five kilometres away. They return home on Saturdays, and leave for school again with some staple foods on Sunday afternoon. It's dangerous for children of seven or eight years old or even younger to climb over the mountains in rain or snow, especially in flood season. The local girls all want to find husbands from outside. It is very hard for men to get married here. So the young people all feel insecure and long eagerly for a better life. How is it that the wider world has developed at a feverish rate while the villagers of Jiyuan still live in such poor conditions? As their ragged verse puts it, "Xiaogoubei, a rough place, we work with grind and mortar night and day, with nothing for cover but dustpan, with no pillow but wooden club...Here are more stones than living souls..."

Still, some people have stayed, and they give the place the breath of life. They don't realise it, but these villagers are admirable. They built



the road and cultivated the land without complaint. I could sense from their warm reception that they hoped we could bring them some new ideas or point out a way to prosperity, to help them break free of poverty.

The Urgent Need to Develop the Land

The village falls within the state natural protection zone so it is forbidden to fell trees here. The villagers can no longer exchange timber for cash, and they are required to turn cultivated land into forests. Their traditional means of earning a livelihood has to change, so they must find new ways or they will have serious problems making a living. The folks knew that I was a landscape photographer, and they hoped I could help introduce this land of primitive beauty and its purity to the world. The expectation in their eyes urged me to take on this task. Whenever I had time, I went up to the mountains. Every time I was there, no matter how busy the villagers were, they would find someone to help me carry my equipment and food. There are no roads in the forests, so villager Wang Guoying always brought an axe to clear a path for me. We were often stopped by brambles or threatened by water snakes and wasps. It was dangerous, but the most beautiful scenery is often found in the remotest places. Though drenched in sweat, we were richly rewarded for our work. In recent years, I have visited many places, but no one spot possessed waterfalls, streams, valleys, high peaks, deep pools, a great variety of birds, animals and plants, and such a rich accumulation of age-old vegetation altogether. Indeed, the villagers have this golden bowl in their hands yet they are begging for food! The beautiful landscape cries out to be appreciated and wisely developed. These folks could turn their verdant treasure into wealth for their people.

Suddenly, I realised that not only the landscape, but also the quaint village, the locals' simple and honest ways, their basic dress and daily life, etc., could all be very attractive to tourists. With a little promotion, such a venture could be highly profitable. In spring, visitors could go for walks when the grass has just begun to turn green, or climb the

mountains, visit people's homes and enjoy their customs, and savour the difference between modern and primitive life styles. In summer, the village is a natural resort in which to escape the heat. You can swim, catch shrimp, and play in the stream. Autumn is not to be missed when



colourful leaves and ripening fruit trees pepper the mountainsides. It would be such a pleasure to taste fresh, wild persimmons and hear the sighing of the wind in the pines. In winter, the bare mountains appear taller and more upright, until they take on a more serene beauty under layers of snow...

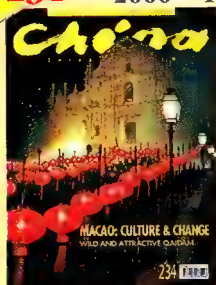
Although Xiaogoubei is still rather poor and undeveloped at present, I am sure that in the near future it will become a brilliant star among the scenic spots in China, and those who had lived here will want to return to their lovely homeland.



Translated by Yu Ling

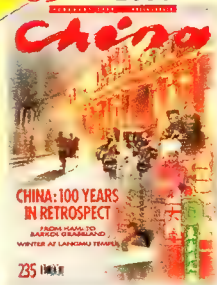


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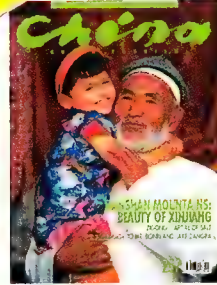
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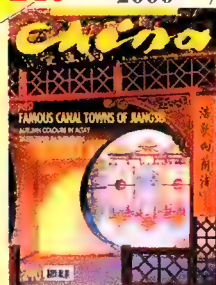
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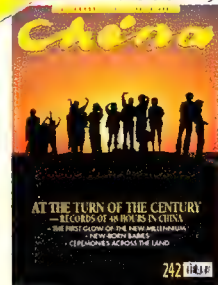
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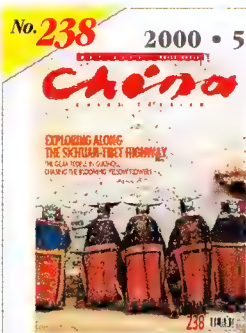


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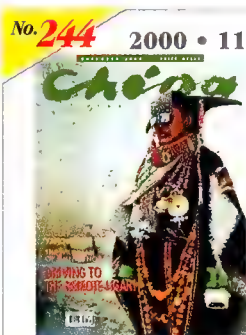
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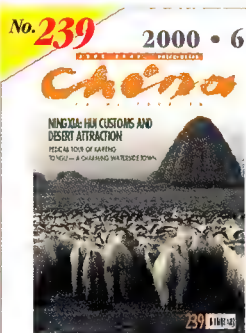
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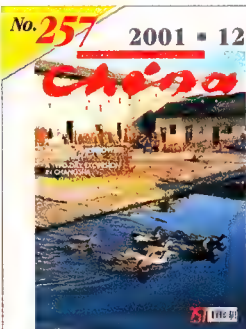
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SPECIALTIES OF ZHEJIANG

Edited by Beth McNeilly & W.P.T.



Zhejiang Province located on China's southeastern coast has been known for centuries for its highly cultured people and civilised way of life. June to September is the time to appreciate its poetic scenery, flowers, trees, lakes and bridges, in famous Zhejiang cities such as Hangzhou, Shaoxing, Jinhua, and Ningbo. Visitors will also find Zhejiang a wonderful place to hunt for souvenirs, since different areas of the province have their own regional and local specialties. The following are some highlights.

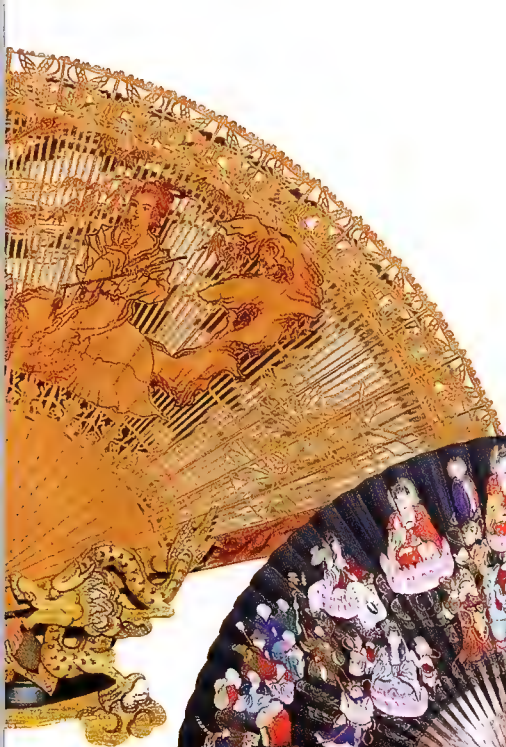
OU MODELLING

Also known as slip modelling, Ou modelling, which has a history of over 1,000 years, is a kind of embossed artwork made with a mixture of tung oil, fine white pottery clay, pigment and paint.

Six major steps are involved in the making. First, a sketch is roughed out on a smooth lacquered board, then a coloured slip is applied to it. Next, images are engraved on the back of the board to correspond to the modelling on the front. The finished piece has a two-dimensional effect and the painted flying birds, running animals, human facial expressions or magnificent landscapes stand out vividly.

Covering a wide range of subjects, styles and patterns, Ou modelling is used for murals, tapestries, hanging mirrors, large and small screens, jewellery boxes and other items.





HANGZHOU FANS

Hangzhou fans have been made since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when they were offered in tribute to the imperial court. The 100-year-old Wangxingji company in Hangzhou is one of the best known fan makers, collecting many local and international awards for its products over the years. The lightweight Hangzhou fans, which come in 10 categories and 100 varieties, are made from black paper, sandalwood, or silk with black or painted bamboo frames.



HANGZHOU BROCADE

Colourful, meticulously crafted Hangzhou brocade is known as "the flower of Oriental art". The more than 1,000 varieties fall into one of two categories, either landscape or decorative. The former features people, animals and nature scenes, faithfully reproducing traditional Chinese paintings. The latter combines everyday objects with decorative items. Vivid and graceful, Hangzhou brocade has long been exported from Zhejiang throughout the world.



WEST LAKE'S LONGJING TEA

Renowned for its high quality, pleasing flavour and colour, Longjing tea takes its name from the area where it is grown. It takes roughly 36,000 tender leaves to make just half a kilogramme of Longjing tea, and the highest quality tea is processed by hand. This unique green tea brews into a clear, aromatic liquid that leaves the surprisingly pleasant aftertaste of fresh olives.

Containing more healthful substances than any other tea variety, Longjing tea is categorised into four classes — Shifeng (Lion Peak), Longjing (Dragon Well), Yunqi (Cloud Habitat) and Hupao (Running Tiger), with Shifeng being the very best.

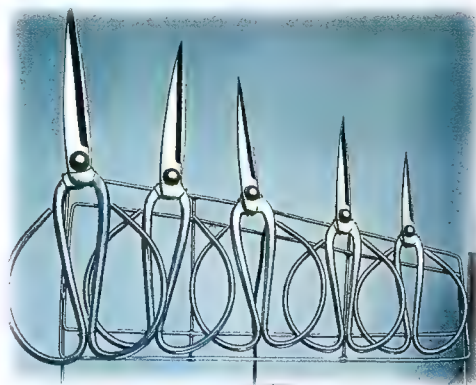


ZHANG XIAOQUAN SCISSORS

小泉剪刀



With a history of over 300 years and the enduring praise of a Qing emperor to their credit, Zhang Xiaoquan scissors continue to enjoy an excellent reputation as the king of scissors. Fashioned from high quality steel, they are prized for their sharpness and durability. Varying styles and types of scissors are manufactured for both domestic and professional use, but visitors are often simply attracted by the exquisite designs and interesting engravings on them.



HUZHOU WRITING BRUSHES

Together with Anhui ink sticks, Xuancheng rice paper and Duanzhou ink stones from Guangdong, Huzhou writing brushes from Shanlian are one of the "four treasures of the studio". The name "Huzhou" comes from Huzhou Prefecture in ancient times, under which jurisdiction present-day Shanlian once fell.

Over 70 steps go into the brush-making process, which includes hair combing, binding, fixing and checking. Top-grade goat hair, rabbit hair or weasel hair are used to form the soft bristles. Huzhou writing brushes are distinguished by sharply pointed tips and evenly formed, round, strong heads. Weasel hair brushes are hailed as the finest.



SHEIGUAI BAMBOO WOVEN WARE



At first glance, it's hard to believe that the items crafted from Shengxian bamboo aren't actually made from fabric or other materials. They have a fluidity not normally associated with bamboo. In order to achieve this quality, the bamboo strips and sheets are carefully prepared so that they may be woven into various human figures, animals, everyday objects and screens, and many different types of weaving techniques come into play. With vivid imagery, harmonious colours, exquisite craftsmanship and an original style, these traditional handicrafts of Shengxian County are both works of art and of practical use. The four categories of Shengxian bamboo woven ware include woven animal figurines, bleached animal figurines, impressed "hua jin" and blue-bodied lacquerware.

SHAOXING WINE

Shaoxing is the home of Chinese wine, and Shaoxing wine making is nearly 2,400 years old. Available in many different strengths and under several different brand names, this light amber wine with its distinctive aroma and mellow flavour is generally produced from high quality glutinous rice and water from nearby Jianhu Lake. Huadiao, the oldest kind of Shaoxing wine, is considered to be of the highest standard.

In the past, parents of a newborn would fill several jars with Huadiao wine and bury them. When the child was to be married, the jars were unearthed and opened for the wedding guests. Some of the wines are called "Daughter Red" or "Scholar Number One Red", to celebrate a daughter reaching womanhood or a son who has done well in his studies.



Its medicinal properties include stimulating appetite and aiding blood circulation. Famous worldwide and the winner of several international awards, Shaoxing wine is one of China's eight famous traditional wines.



LONGQUAN SWORDS

Longquan swords, or Seven-Star Swords, come in a wide variety of styles and patterns. First made during the Zhou Dynasty (approx. 11th century B. C. to 771 B. C.) some 2,600 years ago, the swords comprise three categories: hard swords (known for strength and sharpness), soft swords (noted for flexibility) and the traditional swords used in martial arts. There are also Yunhua (Cloud Flower) swords, stick swords, Yuchang (Fish Intestine) swords and Yuanyang (Mandarin Duck) swords, to name but a few.

All the polishing of Longquan swords is done by hand. A premium sword must be whetted for several days, using a typical grinding stone produced in Longquan County, to give it a brilliant shine. Every sword goes through 28 steps, including forging, scraping, filing, engraving, cooling and polishing. Finished with handles and scabbards made from rare local rosewood, these swords are equally suited to both decorative and martial arts use.



OU EMBROIDERY

Ou embroidery is produced in the Oujiang River area, hence the name. This outstanding art form rivals all other types of embroidery in China, including those of Hunan, Jiangsu, Guangdong and Sichuan provinces.

Ingeniously combining embroidery with painting, Ou embroidery is revered for its superb craftsmanship and different types of stitches. About 1,000 various products are available, including items as diverse as tablecloths, stage costumes, pillowcases, quilt covers, and tapestries. Recently, embroidered pieces such as "The Twelve Beauties" from *A Dream of Red Mansions* and "The Eagle and the Pine Tree" have been well received at international exhibitions in China and abroad.

DONGYANG WOOD CARVING



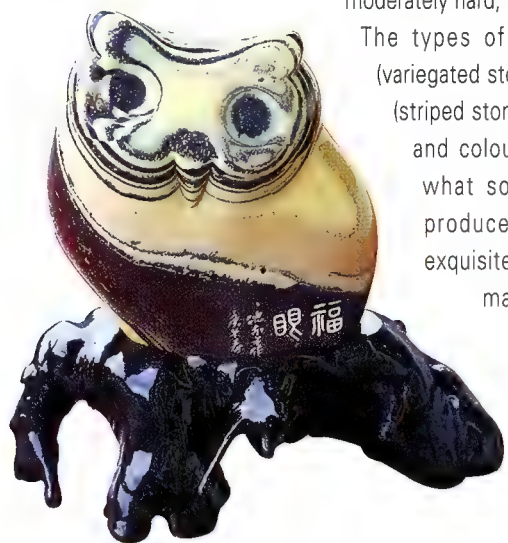
Named for the main place where it is produced, Dongyang woodcarving has its roots in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). It was developed further in the Song dynasty (960-1279) and reached its refinement during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) with many rare items still extant today. Current carvings range from architectural ornamentation to religious articles and of course souvenirs. Carved from scented, fine-grained, hard camphor wood, the works feature figures from history and fairy tales as their main subject matter, and many different carving techniques, including double-faced openwork and intaglio, are employed to create detailed tableaus. Artistically simple and elegant, Dongyang wood carvings are highly original.



QINGTIAN STONE CARVING

Qingtian stone carving is believed to have started about 1,000 years ago during the Song dynasty. The stone, from Qingtian County, is smooth and moderately hard, with deep natural colours.

The types of stone include Caishi (variegated stone), Dongshi, or Wenshi (striped stone), the differing textures and colours of which determine what sort of artwork may be produced. Some of the more exquisitely wrought pieces are a marvel when the carver's creativity and the naturally occurring aspects of the stone itself come together in perfect harmony.



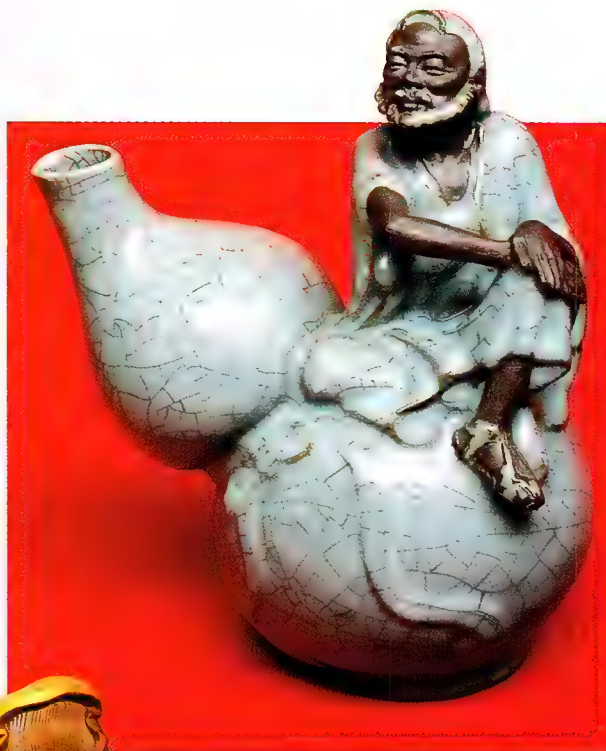
ZHEJIANG SILK

Zhejiang Province has been a silk-producing centre for over 4,700 years. Known for elegant designs and excellent quality, Zhejiang silk products come in nearly 200 varieties and over 2,000 patterns. Sewing enthusiasts will find satin, brocade, crepe, damask and many other fabrics, ideal for making anything from clothing and lingerie to bedding and curtains, etc.

LONGQUAN CELADON

Elegant, world-famous Longquan celadon was first produced some 1,000 years ago during the Five Dynasties period (907-960) and later refined in the Southern Song (1127-1279). Defined as being "as green as jade, as clear as a mirror and, when tapped, producing the sound of a chime", Longquan celadon comes in two varieties fired in two different kinds of kilns.

Yet another product once offered in tribute to the imperial court of the Tang Dynasty, it was first exported around the same time, becoming a sensation in Paris in the late 16th century. Apart from the celadon products created for daily use or decoration, many pieces copy antique designs. The celebrated Linglong celadon, which is suited to relief, bas-relief and openwork techniques, has transparent, translucent or opaque qualities.



JINHUA HAM

With a history dating back 900 years to the Song Dynasty, Jinhua ham is currently produced in the cities of Jinhua, Dongyang,



Yiwu, Yongkang, Pujiang and Lanxi. The ham was first offered in tribute to the imperial court. Its many varieties include Jiang ham, smoked ham, wind-dried ham and ham made with thick soy sauce. Jiang ham, with its rosy colour and delectable flavour, is the most notable of these.



BOXWOOD CARVING

Thanks to its size, texture and hardness, boxwood is perfect for bric-a-brac carving. It is ideal for figurines, including statues of arhats, Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy) and the Eight Immortals. There is a simplicity to boxwood which gives objects crafted from it a special appeal. Boxwood carving, Qingtian stone carving and Dongyang wood carving are considered Zhejiang's three most famous types of carving.



HANGZHOU WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Hangzhou white chrysanthemums can be used in beverages and as a medicine. First, the fresh blossoms are steamed and then dried. The dried chrysanthemums, which contain glucose, amino acids and other beneficial trace elements, can bring relief from fever and eyestrain, as well as aid in detoxification. They have been used to reduce high blood pressure, combat migraines and help alleviate other ailments. Aside from these more practical qualities, Hangzhou white chrysanthemums make a restorative, sweet and fragrant tea.



Editor's Note: What I find most enjoyable as an editor is getting responses from readers to some of the travel notes I have written. Even a short e-mail message delights me for the better part of a day. If one of my travel notes encourages a reader to make a trip and then write an interesting story about it for us, it is even exciting! We have one such story below....



JOURNEY TO NORTHWEST SICHUAN

Photos & article by Zhuo Lihang



Letter from Zhuo Lihang: Last October, I finally realised my dream to visit Jiuzhaigou on my own. I must say that I owe this to an article I read in *China Tourism*. If not for the article "Backpacker's Tour — Northwest Sichuan Highland", which outlined how to go there without joining a tour group, I would never have made such a trip. I did worry over my decision. But since the article's author, a young Hong Kong woman, was able to do it, why couldn't I? As it turned out, I not only made my wish come true by visiting this beautiful place, but I also discovered the joys of travelling alone. Therefore, I am most grateful to you. Enclosed please find my travel notes as a token of my gratitude.

Setting off in a Jolly Good Mood

My decision to make this trip was so hasty that I was unable to find a suitable travelling companion. As I had ten days' holiday to take in a beautiful autumn, there was no reason not to go. With a slightly palpitating heart, I boarded a train at Guangzhou bound for Chengdu. A kind of glee arose as I moved further and further from the

city. "Now I'm on the way!" Two days and two nights passed amidst spells of reading and sleeping. A fellow traveller from Chengdu happened to be going there, too, but he had decided to join a tour group. I had my own ideas. First, I would visit Dujiangyan and then make a detailed itinerary. At the Ximen Terminus, before I bought my ticket, I was drawn to the booth selling tickets to Aba

Prefecture. Jiuzhaigou, Songpan, Miyalo, Zoigê... a number of attractive names stirred my heart. But at the thought of those travelling in luxurious coaches, mindlessly herded around by guides, wearing the same red caps and holding little yellow flags, I purchased a long-distance bus ticket to Songpan for the next day with no hesitation. Then, I went to Dujiangyan.



Unique Tourist Atmosphere in Songpan

I boarded a bus for Songpan at 7 a.m. There were three foreigners, but most passengers were locals. After 12 hours, which were surprisingly bearable, we arrived at Songpan.

Songpan is a small town. After two days, you know every nook and cranny. Even the shop owners and market vendors say hello to you. In the streets, in Internet bars, in eateries, you inevitably encounter loud-talking, laid back travellers.

There was a place to rent horses known as "Happy Trails" outside the northern gate of town. The walls of the little place were covered with maps in both Chinese and English, photos, sketches, etc. It was run by a man named Chen Jiangang, a friendly, smart young chap who spoke good English. Many foreign tourists came here to rent horses to ride on the trails opened up by him over the years. He greeted each customer in his warm and simple manner.

Soon I began to like this small town. I could have passed through Songpan and gone elsewhere without returning to save time. However, I decided to make this town my base and come back to it after each

excursion. In particular, I liked to go to "Happy Trails" for a break, to drink a cup of hot tea and relax. There I got to know many travellers, learned the latest news, shared travel experiences with others and found out ways to save money. I am kind of a reticent girl and always keep a cool demeanour when travelling. But this time, the atmosphere in Songpan made me feel rather garrulous, and I enjoyed talking to people and making friends.

The first evening in Songpan, I found a small restaurant and ate whatever was on offer. Later, as I sauntered along the street, I noticed a crowd gathered round a stall selling skewers of roast mutton cubes. It was a group of art students who were staying in the same hotel as me. They were discussing with the vendor whether to go to his house to treat themselves to a whole roasted sheep. Mr. Pang, their teacher, invited me to join them.



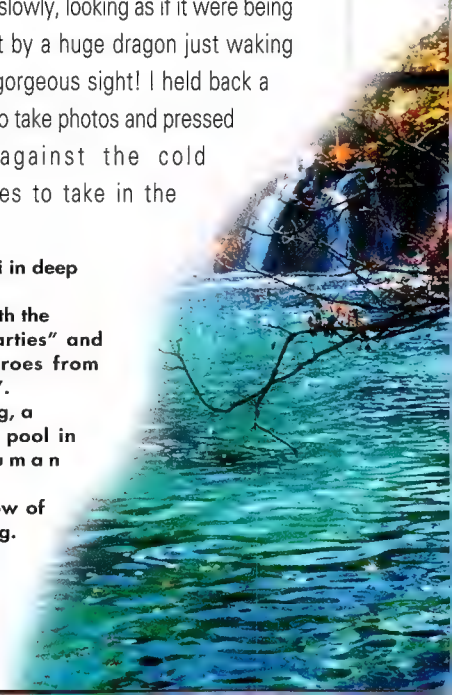
Besides, one more person would reduce the cost per person. I admired their sense of fun and animation and readily agreed. I only regretted that I had already had my supper, the only meal I ate alone in the trip. Magically, Alibaba, the mutton seller, produced a fat sheep seemingly from nowhere. He hailed two minibuses and stuffed all of us and the sheep aboard. It was so crowded that I almost had to sit on the sheep. You can imagine our

expectations while the sheep was roasting and all the clamour during dinner.

Huanglong After Snow

After a night of rain, the morning sky remained overcast. I took a seven o'clock bus to Huanglong. As the vehicle struggled up the mountain, I was surprised to see snow on the ground. Before long, powerful sunbeams pierced through the thick clouds like sharp swords and threw themselves onto the mountain tops, which dazzled in the light. Thick fog lingered over the peaks which were now tinged with golden trim. Then the fog began to roll slowly, looking as if it were being breathed out by a huge dragon just waking up. What a gorgeous sight! I held back a strong urge to take photos and pressed my face against the cold windowpanes to take in the

1. Wuhuahai in deep autumn.
2. Dinner with the "Three Parties" and "Four Heroes from Malaysia".
3. Huanglong, a heavenly pool in the human world.
4. Fresh snow of Huanglong.



landscape. When I saw a team of photographers fanning out in a line along the road shooting pictures, I could hold myself back no longer. I begged the driver to stop the bus for a moment so that I could take a few pictures. But he slowly shook his head, saying that the road conditions there were too poor to park. I could only gaze out at the beautiful scene receding away.

As soon as I entered Huanglong, the weather turned fine with ample sunshine. Huanglong, after snow, was a pure world. I could not help clicking my tongue in admiration even as I walked alone.

The bus back to Songpan was said to pass Huanglong around four in the afternoon, so I positioned myself at the entrance to Huanglong at three. A man who was looking



after a few portable toilets noticed me loitering there and offered me a stool. So there I sat, in front of the toilets, sunning my damp coat and waiting for the bus. Tourist coaches carted away crowds of visitors. Just then, a minibus came by, pausing in the hope of finding more passengers. There were already three people on it. I took a closer look and found that I had met them on the mountain. So I jumped in. The fare, 40 yuan, was twice as much as I had expected. However, I got to know a Chinese man called Michael and persuaded him to spend some time horseback riding in Songpan while waiting for me to finish my touring. As a result, he went riding in Songpan for two days until I returned from Jiuzhaigou.

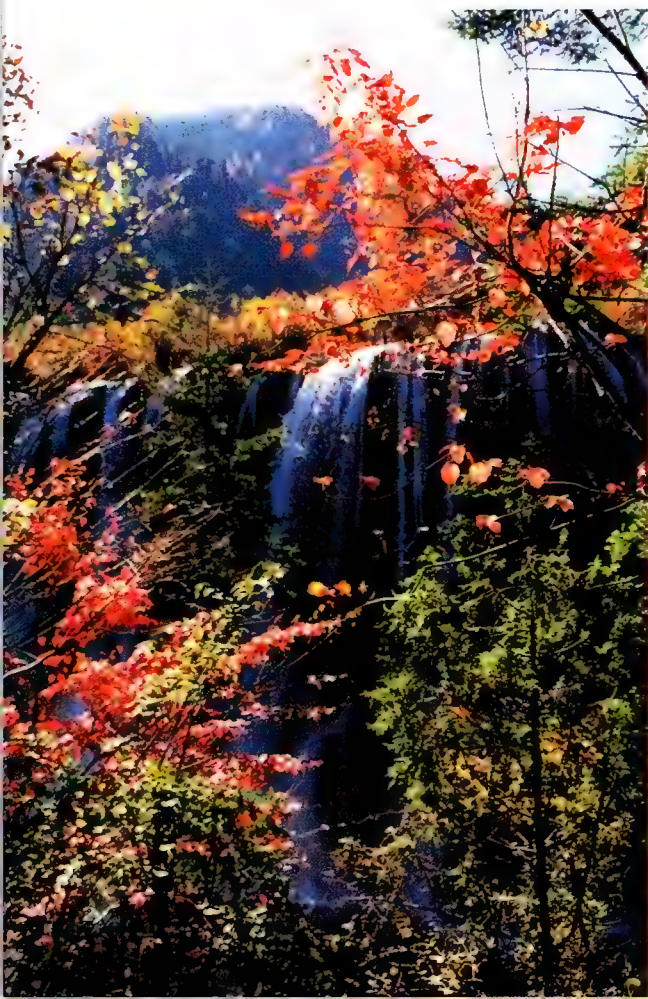
Breathtaking Jiuzhaigou

I had to set off very early the next morning. The golden scenery outside the bus windows reminded me that Jiuzhaigou was still in the throes of autumn. The beauty of the place begged description and so many people have written about it already. However, my feelings of joy and some

interesting characters I met during the trip are north writing about.

One guy, known as C.H., was from Guangxi. He travelled alone with all sorts of cameras dangling off him and a large tripod slung over his shoulder. He looked a bookish type. He complained all day about the lack of sunshine. After walking behind him awhile, seeing him weighed down by all his equipment, I offered to carry something. But he could not let a girl help him. It was enough to keep him company, he said. So during the first day in Jiuzhaigou, he became my companion. He had been entrusted by a friend of his to take some pictures in Jiuzhaigou. When Jiuzhaigou revealed its beauty, he was as surprised as me. We gaped at it, amazed and excited.

The next day, I met a team of four middle-aged and elderly tourists who I called the "Four Heroes from Malaysia". They were touring Jiuzhaigou on foot! It took them six to seven hours to walk from the entrance of Jiuzhaigou to Shuzheng Village. They planned to continue their excursions on foot over the next two days. I also admired their frugality. Like me, they stayed in a small hotel, each paying 10-yuan for a bed and using the public bath. As food in Jiuzhaigou





was rather expensive, they shared two dishes, one meat and one vegetable, plus cooked rice, for a meal. As a younger person, I found them extraordinary.

Another group I encountered were the "Three Parties on the Internet", comprised of Little Grey Cat of Changsha, a pair of twins from Shanghai and Little Feng from Xi'an. They had discussed and decided to make this trip via the Internet. Actually I had met the twins and Little Feng when I first arrived. They thought I might be Little Grey Cat, whom they were waiting to meet for the first time. That night, the "Four Heroes from Malaysia", the "Three Parties" and I had dinner together and chatted amicably until midnight.

The following morning, we said good-bye to one another. I preferred to enjoy tranquil Jiuzhaigou alone. Walking on a little path in some dappled shade, I gazed at ripples in a stream and a golden stretch of forest. Occasionally, I saw some small signs posted along the way. One said, "Shhhh... be quiet!

There are little animals here." I could not help letting out a joyful laugh.

A "Beggar" from Singapore

When I returned to Songpan, I found Michael at the mutton stall. He told me some interesting stories about what had happened in Songpan while I was away.

One day, a team of horseback riders returned to Songpan from Xuebaoding. When a slightly-built Singaporean man dismounted from his horse, the townspeople were surprised to see a man in tatters. His trousers were ripped open from ankle to thigh. He was covered with mud; even his hair was standing up because of the mud in it. He looked just like a beggar. Except for his eyes, nothing about him resembled the man who had set off initially. He became the talk of the town. It was said that he had fallen from his horse five or six times. He, however, was most pleased with his little riding excursion.

Michael also got to know a young couple who had actually become acquainted and

fallen in love in Songpan. The young man was from Hong Kong, the girl from Singapore. A few years back, they had come to Songpan at the same time with their respective friends to ride horses. As they were put into the same team, they saw each other every day and love began to grow. When their friends had to return because their holidays were up, they two stayed on for another month. They rode along all the trails and got to know all the horse grooms. Finally, they parted, reluctantly. But they had made an appointment to visit Songpan again and see their old friends. Such romances were not uncommon. The first owner of "Happy Trails" had fallen in love with an English girl and immigrated abroad.

1. Picturesque scenery of Jiuzhaigou.
2. Nuorilang Waterfall in autumn.
3. After a night of snow, Muni Gully is engulfed in white. (by Michael)



Horseback Riding

Our caravan was not large, consisting of Michael, Laura from Scotland, and me, plus three horse grooms, Ping Ping, Little Dong and Ma Ma, and our tents and quilts. As we climbed over the ridge, we saw the whole town of Songpan at the foot of the mountain. The mountain ridge undulated under the endless sky. Stretch after stretch of birches blazed in the sunshine. Our horses trotted steadily along. We let go of the reins and let the horses go where they pleased. It was so free and relaxing, an experience unknown in cities.

Our destination was Erdaohai and then Zhaga Waterfall. It took us three days to go there and come back. While the scenery in those two places was, to be frank, not as spectacular as that of Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong, each had its own charms.

On average, we rode horses for half a day and took a break for the other half. We always pitched our tents where there was beautiful scenery. Every time when we stopped, we would walk around to see forest, marshland, hot springs, and waterfalls while the grooms erected the tents and prepared the meals. When we got back, the food was ready. After a simple but piping-hot meal one night, we built a bonfire and sat a kettle of tea over the flame. We chatted on and on. Ping Ping gave Laura a new name, "Hai Tian Ya". I told her that it meant "long, long way to the end of the land". Laura was very pleased. When the snow grew heavier, we entered our tents to sleep. Ma Ma had made up the bedding, a layer of fresh pine needles covered with blankets. Saddles served as our pillows. After we slipped into our sleeping bags, they spread several layers of quilts over us, tucking us in as though we were kids. Though we slept on the snowy ground, we did not find it cold at all. The next morning we woke up early because of bright daylight outside the tent. When we got up and emerged from the

tent, we were delighted to see a world of white. Even the tent was covered with a thick layer of snow. It was so white and pure, showing not even one footprint, that I was reluctant to walk on it.

On the way back, I met the twins again and a Guangxi girl named Huang Hui. Together, we went back to Songpan. That was my last day of the trip. Dinner that evening was so unforgettable. The diners sitting around the table came from all over the world; some were new acquaintances; some I had met on several occasions during the past few days. However, we seemed like friends of long standing. Ah Chao of Hong Kong and his girlfriend from Singapore, the twins from Shanghai, Huang Hui of Guangxi, Michael of Hubei, Laura of Scotland and me from Guangzhou. Everybody said that their minds seemed to have been cleansed. Relations between human beings became so simple and pure, something rarely felt by city dwellers.

G

1. Snow begins to fall on an autumn night in Muni Gully. (by Michael)



The Natural Buddha

Photos & article by Sun Yunliang

Tianfo, or the Natural Buddha, in Junan County, Shandong Province is truly remarkable. At a full length of 3,800 metres, he has a distinct face and four easily distinguishable limbs. He rests his head on a green mountain to the southwest and stretches his feet towards a limpid lake in the northeast. He has a rather high, broad forehead and a deeply set mouth which is smiling all the time. With a slightly upturned pug nose and kind eyes, his whole countenance is both solemn and full of life.

Located in the southeastern part of Shandong Province, Junan County possesses both natural and historical landscapes. In the Tianfo scenic area of 6,000 hectares, there are four scenic spots: the Natural Buddha, the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, the Lotus Mountain, and the Lotus Pool.

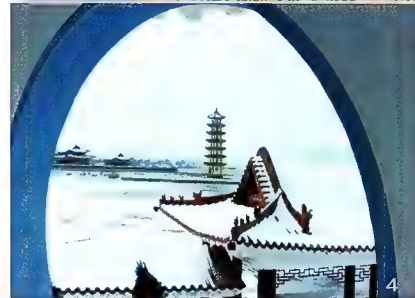


There is a beautiful story about this Natural Buddha. Legend has it that once there was an old man called Hua Fang in Huyuan (Tiger Garden) Village at the foot of Tianfo Mountain who had a white horse. One night the horse fought with a tiger while defending the village. In the chaos, the old man cut the horse's mane by mistake so the horse lost its power and was hurt by the tiger. The chagrined old man tried to kill the tiger but he was hurt by it, too. Seeing this, God asked Buddha and Bodhisattva to tame the tiger. After the task was done, Buddha turned into a green mountain. To commemorate the Buddha's benefaction, a Temple of the Reclining Buddha with an area of over 6.67 hectares was built at the foot of Tianfo Mountain during the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589). It has seen an endless stream of pilgrims for over 1,000 years. Rebuilt in 1996, the temple was expanded over a two-year period, with a group of structures built in ancient style which include the Temple Gate, the Drum and Bell Tower, the Shrine of Sakyamuni Buddha, the Reclining Buddha Hall, the eastern and western wing halls, the monks' living quarters and a seven-storey dagoba.

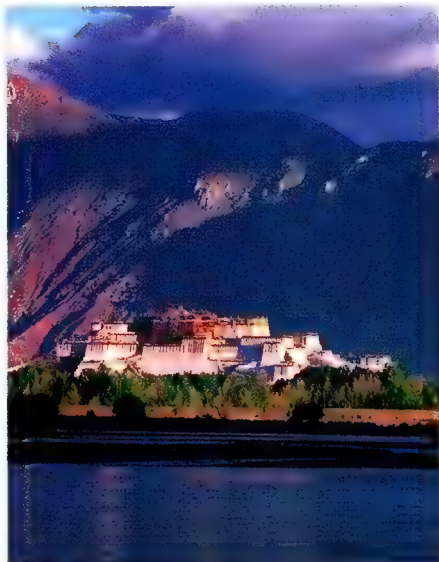
In the southeastern corner of the temple stands a Chinese scholar tree which is over 1,300 years old. According to legend, it was planted before the temple gate during the Kaiyuan reign (713) of the

Tang Dynasty (618-907) by the famous monk Yixing when he was revising the Dayan Calendar. There are also several steles recording the temple's history which tourists may see.

Translated by Yu Ling



1. The Reclining Buddha in Junan County richly deserves his fame.
2. Observed from every side, the Reclining Buddha is absolutely lifelike.
3. With one eye a naturally formed karst cave, the Reclining Buddha's face looks strikingly natural. Standing on it, tourists look so tiny.
4. In winter the Reclining Buddha's Temple takes on a special aspect.
5. The Tianfo scenic area boasts a delightfully wide stretch of landscape.



Adventures by the Lhasa River

Photo & article by Feng Yanjun

In the dim starlight,

I could see, about 100 metres to my right, the riverbank of the Lhasa River. The river itself was like a bright, half-hidden ribbon flowing eastward... "Whoops!" I bumped my head against a tree branch and my tripod dropped to the ground. Fortunately, my camera bag was still in my grasp.

After crossing a small bridge, the four of us split up to have a look around. Alone, I groped my way along the riverbank, which was brambly and full of cobbles. Suddenly I found a pebbled path leading to the river. I hurried forward but just as I stepped onto the loose stones, they began to move and I slid down with them. Luckily there were neither brambles nor water nearby, so all I got was a cold sweat. Eventually we found a flat space of about 10 square metres, so we set up our cameras and waited for the magnificent morning sun.

In the faint predawn light, the outline of the Potala Palace could be vaguely perceived against the mountains. Then we realised that our position was not at all good for taking pictures. We had to move westward for a hundred metres to the riverside. Yet to our great disappointment, the sun didn't appear until 9 a.m., so we had to turn back without having accomplished anything.

Early the next morning, we went again to take pictures by the Lhasa River. After the taxi stopped at a spot where the river was rather wide, we chose a position and set up our cameras. However, when dawn came we found that it was not as good as the spot we had selected the day before. We ran back in great haste as there was only an hour before sunrise, but it would be impossible to find another taxi in that remote place in time to cover the five kilometre distance. We had no choice but to run. On the high plateau where oxygen is rare, we became rather lightheaded and soon ran out of breath. To make things worse, Mr. Wang, my teammate, had to stop for his aggravated bowels. I didn't want to lose time and kept running. A while later, a tractor came rolling past. Standing in the middle of the road, I tried desperately to flag it down and Mr. Wang also ran over, holding up his trousers all the way.

When the first sun rays appeared at daybreak, rosy clouds floated in the east over the snowcapped peaks before they gradually faded away. In the embrace of the brown mountains, the white walls of the Potala Palace seemed lit up, its ethereal image reflected in the Lhasa River, changing with the flow all the time.

As if with heaven's help, we reached our destination just minutes before sunrise. All of a sudden, a beam of golden sun pierced through the clouds in the east and shone upon the Potala Palace, making it appear even more charming, mesmerising yet reserved, like a great diamond beset in the embrace of the mountains. This beautiful image became the most wonderful picture of our trip.

Anecdotes of My First Trip

Article by Mingyu

I can hardly believe it's been ten years since I first started travelling.

Now, as I recall anecdotes from when I first carried my backpack, I cannot help but smile. Some buddies and I took the popular travel route to Beijing and eastern China where the first problem we met with was language. In the early 1990s, people in Hong Kong had rather limited Mandarin skills and I was no exception. Upon boarding the train from Hong Kong to Beijing, we saw that the luggage rack was fully packed. We tried to ask people to give us a little space, but couldn't make ourselves understood without the help of gestures for quite a while. During the trip, we continually had problems communicating.

Before we left, we had often heard that it was dangerous on the train, a hotbed for crime. We were naturally wary as first-time travellers. So we broke into groups, taking turns to watch our luggage at night. We were really keyed up back then.

On our first trip we took a lot of luggage. In those days, there were not as many daily goods available as there are now on the mainland, so we took all kinds of daily necessities such as instant noodles, biscuits, chocolate powder, and even tins and toilet paper made on the mainland. Actually they could all be bought easily in big cities, but we just felt that the more we took, the less misgivings we might have during our trip.

After over 30 hours of useless worrying, we finally reached Beijing. Upon stepping off the platform, one of our buddies had an upset stomach. A railway clerk told us there was a WC just outside the railway station. We went into a small lane and were followed by a cleaner who kept saying something we couldn't make out. Timid as we were, we became more scared when followed by someone. After about 20 metres he caught up with us. It turned out that he just wanted to ask the time, but we were nearly frightened to death!

After checking into our hotel, we immediately set out to tour the city. It was high noon and we went to the Grand View Garden in high spirits only to find very few visitors. Later we found out that as there were not many trees in the Grand View Garden to provide shade, not many people liked going there in the heat of the day. After all it was our first trip and we didn't know how to properly arrange a schedule. Also we believed that as healthy young guys we could economise by going there on foot instead of taking the bus. We never expected the two-stop bus ride would take us almost an hour to walk—the distance between two stops in Beijing is much greater than that in Hong Kong. So when we got to the bus stop, we squatted by the roadside to rest like the mainlanders.

Although ten years have passed since our "virgin" trip, all that we went through is still distinct in my memory. Whenever I take out my photo albums, they always give me great amusement. After all, the first experience is often the most impressive.

Why I Love Spain

Photo & article by Duckling

If you want to find the most peculiar country in Europe, it would be no other than Spain. In the northern border towns you see not green lawns or snow-capped mountains or lakes, but sand, cacti, coconut trees and simple earthen houses. But that is Spain; every corner of the country has something special. No wonder a friend from Taiwan also said that Spain is quite peculiar.

It seems that Barcelona where I stayed was made for Antonio Gaudi. His architectural creations add so much beauty and life to the city that without Gaudi, one can safely say that there would be no Barcelona today. His most famous structure is the great cathedral, although he wasn't able to finish this masterpiece in his lifetime. Once inside the cathedral with its special atmosphere, you would think that Spain was not part of Europe at all. There were no traditional images of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, no organ music, no choir, no priests or nuns. There was only the soul of Gaudi, and the tourists who had come to appreciate the cathedral.

Then there is Guell Park. In the already singular environment and culture of Spain, this park designed by Gaudi only "adds flowers to the brocade." It was my first time to step into a tropical park in Europe. Instead of prim, green lawns dotted with squirrels and pigeons, I was walking on a large stretch of sand crowded with coconut trees. It was more like South America than Europe. There were a lot of ornaments designed by Gaudi there as well. It was wonderful to sit in the square on curved stools inlaid with little flowery designs in glass. You simply can't help admiring the marvellously bold and meticulous creations of Gaudi.

So my love for Spain is mainly because of Gaudi. Besides him, I also admire other Spanish artists, such as Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali. I like Spain because it feels more laid back than other European countries. I enjoy its demeanour of being somewhat destitute and backward. I relish the carefree manner in which people shut down their shops from 2 to 4 every afternoon for siesta. And I admire its high esteem for art. In all of Europe, Spain has no equal.



Just Guess Article by A Yat
Early this year, I was sent by my company to guide a 10-day group tour to Liping, Rongjiang, Congjiang and Sanjiang in Guizhou Province. Our key stops were to be the Dong ethnic group, the ancient towers and the flowery bridge. We set out on Lunar New Year's Day and drove from Jiangzhen to the Basha Miao Village 20 kilometres away. Upon disembarking, I was first attracted, not by the warm welcoming ceremony, but by the hairstyles of the Miao people. They seemed so avant garde — the men wore their hair in a small, onion-like bun atop their heads and the women's hairstyle resembled the prow of a ship. Their costumes were especially colourful.

Twang! Twang! Twang! Three shots of salute were followed by firecrackers going off, then at the gate our hosts took up cups of wine and sang songs inviting toasts. I was pushed forward to drink first, so I pressed my lips to the ox horn with my hands clasped behind my back, because if I had held the horn in my hands, the host would have insisted that I drink it all. Everyone in my group followed suit but many of us drank little more than a mouthful. Seeing this, the villager who had fired the salute felt it a pity to waste the wine. We watched him drink three ox horns of wine in one go.

Then we were led to the village amidst the singing of young people. The houses were all built against the hills and there were no electronic household appliances except for electric lights. We came to a flat area between the hills and enjoyed singing and dancing with the locals. I chatted with the villager who had set off the fireworks. He seemed very pleased and asked me half-drunk: "Where did you come from?" I smiled, "Just guess!" He responded, "Oh, so you came from just guess!" I simply laughed. Then he asked again, "Is it far to just guess? Where is it?" I replied again, "Just guess!" Hearing this, he laughed, "So I see, you came from the just guess city of the just guess province!"

A Trip to Central and Southern Viet Nam

Article by Li Huiping

I travelled to Viet Nam alone during the Christmas period recently. My first stop was Da Nang, a small city reminiscent of the mainland in the 1960s and 1970s. Few tourists could be seen there, and shop vendors were asking exorbitant prices. There were no hot tourist spots or comfortable modern facilities in Da Nang, so at night the streets were dimly lit and very underdeveloped looking. Yet just an hour's drive away, the city of Hoi An stands out with its old Chinese and French buildings which seem even more impressive than the ancient cities in Yunnan.

Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, is quite different from Da Nang as well. The motorbikes, tall buildings, neon lights, and tourists from all parts of the world, seem to speak of a city being modernised. Having spent 100 years as a French colony, the city's streets give one a sense of France, mostly in architectural features like arches, columns and walls covered with artistic relief. The delicate women in traditional Vietnamese dress look especially beautiful and charming in their half-transparent national costume. It's also not hard to find a pedlar in a cone-shaped bamboo hat carrying two baskets of goods on shoulder-poles and conducting business on the street. That's a typical sight in Viet Nam.

What impressed me most were the motorbikes and the WCs. Virtually every Saigoner has a motorbike, so during rush hours the streets are fully packed with the machines. Honking and petrol odours permeate the whole city. Meanwhile, WCs are very rare and the sanitary conditions in the few available ones could well be compared with those in the mainland.

Saigon also has its dark side, such as the notorious motorbike robbers. I heard about three such crimes, all committed on the street by gangs suddenly attacking a rider from behind. One unfortunate man even had his wrist broken and was hospitalised. Besides, there are other dangers. I had my airline ticket and telescope stolen. Though not a great loss, it dampened my previously good mood.

PHOTOGRAPHING NIGHT SCENES:

USING AVAILABLE LIGHT

*Photos and article by
Robert Jerome*



Robert Jerome is a New York - based photographer who has travelled extensively. In his 25-year career, he has visited over 60 countries. Religious ceremonies and other aspects of local life with a strong ethnic flavour are his favourite subjects. He shares some of his photography tips below.

Tip 1

Whenever possible, use a tripod to mount your camera and a long exposure time to photograph night scenes. With most modern automatic cameras, if you set the F-stop to provide for a good depth of field, at F11 for example, then the camera automatically determines how long the shutter should remain open to properly expose the photograph.

As strange as it may sound, I rarely use flash to photograph night scenes. Used as a secondary source of light during the day in a technique known as "fill flash", flash can help reduce shadows in faces or make subjects stand out against a bright background. However, when used as the primary source of light in night photography, flash often produces "explosions" of light that make subjects look as if they were the proverbial deer caught in the headlights of a car.

Tip 2

When photographing sunsets, shoot your pictures when the sun is only a sliver on the horizon or shortly after the sun has gone down while the sky is still illuminated. If you shoot your pictures when the entire sun is still visible, your camera will underexpose the other elements in your scene and the only thing you will see clearly in the resulting picture will be the sun.

Tip 3

When photographing city scenes at night, shoot your pictures shortly after sunset when the sky is still a deep blue. If you wait until the sky is entirely black, there will be little distinction in your pictures between the dark buildings and the equally dark sky.

Tip 4

Use available sources of light, rather than flash, to illuminate your



night pictures. Candlelight and streetlights provide a warm glow to scenes and create a much better sense of "night" than flash.

Tip 5

For night scenes in which there is a wide variation between the lighter and darker areas of the picture, "bracket" your shots. In other words, take several shots of the same scene at exposures over and under the exposure indicated by your camera. Then, after the photographs are processed, you can choose which picture best conveys the mood of the scene.

Tip 6

If you cannot use a tripod, use a "fast" film of ASA 400 or more to achieve shutter speeds that will allow you to hold the camera to take a

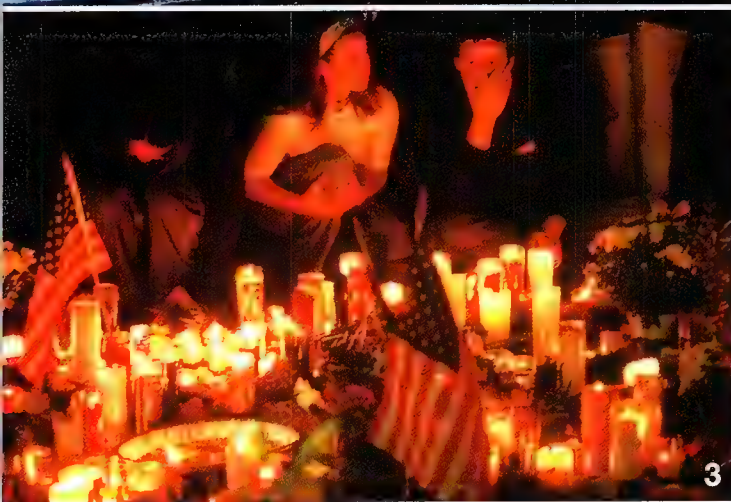
picture without blurring it. As a rule, the inverse of the lens length is the slowest shutter speed at which you can do this. For example, if you have a 50mm lens, 1/50th of a second is the slowest shutter speed at which you can take a picture and still have a sharp image with a hand-held camera. Taking a picture with a 50mm lens at a slower speed, for example 1/25th of a second, is likely to result in a blurred image with a hand-held camera.

Tip 7

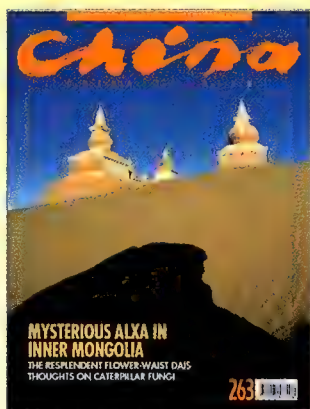
If you are shooting slide film, you can achieve faster shutter speeds (and simultaneously less blur) if you "push" your film a "stop". For example, Fuji Provia 400F slide film, which has an ASA of 400, can be shot at an ASA of 800. Pushing film a stop increases the grain of the resulting picture somewhat, but with a film such as Provia 400F, which has a very fine grain to start with, there is very little difference between photographs shot at 400 ASA and 800 ASA. If you choose to push film a stop, you must shoot the entire roll at the increased ASA and be sure to tell the processor that the film has been "pushed one stop".

Tip 8

If you must use flash, be sure that the main subject of your picture is the closest object to your flash. The intensity of flash diminishes greatly the further an object is from the camera. If any other object is closer to the flash than the main subject of your picture, the subject will not be properly exposed.



1. Sunset at Rodeo Beach in Marin County, California. The best sunset shots are taken right when the sun goes down or about 15 minutes after sunset when the sky becomes its most intensely colourful.
2. San Francisco Bay Sunset (as in Picture 1, use a tripod and a long exposure by setting the F stop at F11 and allowing the camera to determine the exposure length).
3. The candlelight used as the source of light in this picture of a September 11th vigil in New York City's Union Square adds to the sombreness of the scene. Flash would undercut the mood.
4. Carnival parade in the Sambodromo in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. If you must use flash, be sure that the main subject of your picture is the closest subject to your camera.
- 5,6. These shots of the Empire State Building were taken about 10 minutes apart. Immediately after sunset, the sky remains dark blue for several minutes and sets the buildings apart from the sky. When the sky is black, it is difficult to separate the dark buildings from the equally dark sky.



Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Alxa – Land of Mystery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Taihu Lake – A Vast Expanse of Water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who is Destroying the Grassland?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Others: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
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Articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Art Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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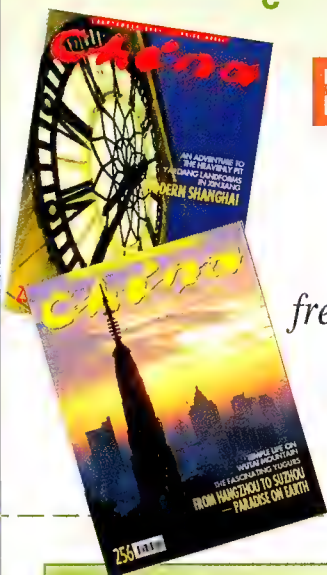
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Hotels in Ningxia

City	Name	Star	Address	Tel	Fax
Yinchuan	Ningxia Internation Hotel	***	25 Beijuan Avenue E, Yinchuan	(951) 6029688	(951) 6091808
	Ningfeng Hotel	**	236 Jiefang St E, Yinchuan	(951) 6028898	(951) 6027224
	Ningxia Hotel (South Yard)	**	3 Park St, Yinchuan	(951) 5045131	(951) 5044338
	Yinchuan Helanshan Hotel	**	1 Shuofang Rd, Xinshi Dist., Yinchuan	(951) 2077301	
	Taiyangshen Hotel	**	Yixin Rd N, Yinchuan	(951) 5046770	(951) 5046609
	Dianli Hotel Ningxia	**	22 Minzu St S, Yinchuan	(951) 6028658	

Hotels in Gansu

City	Name	Star	Address	Tel	Fax
Lanzhou	Lanzhou Legend Hotel	****	399 Tianshui Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 8882876	(931) 8887876
	Lanzhou Hotel	***	434 Donggang Rd W, Lanzhou	(931) 8416321	(931) 8418608
	Jincheng Hotel Lanzhou	***	363 Tianshui Avenue, Lanzhou	(931) 8416638	(931) 8418438
	Guanghua Hotel	***	231 Jiuquan Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 8436168	(931) 8438168
	Lanzhou Friendship Hotel	***	16 Xijin Rd W, Lanzhou	(931) 2333051	(931) 2330304
	Gansu Dizhi Hotel	**	85 Hongxing Lane, Dingxi Avenue S, Lanzhou	(931) 8618880	(931) 8616557
	Lanyuan Hotel	**	367 Yumen St, Lanzhou	(931) 7554014	(931) 7573700
	Friendship Hotel Lanzhou	**	14 Xijin Rd W, Lanzhou	(931) 2333051	(931) 2330304
	Victory Hotel Lanzhou	**	127 Zhongshan Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 8465221	(931) 8461531
	Lanhua Hotel Lanzhou	**	222 Fuli Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 7555981	(931) 7557635
	Lanzhou Mansion	**	7-9 Tianshui Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 8417210	(931) 8417177
	Hongyun Hotel Lanzhou	**	5 Gaolan Rd, Lanzhou	(931) 8826011	(931) 8885687
	Zhongshan Hotel Lanzhou	**	426 Zhongshan Rd, Lanzhou		
Dunhuang	Dunhuang Shazhou Hotel	***	31 Yangguan Rd C, Dunhuang	(937) 8825031	(937) 8825705
	Dunhuang Hotel	***	1 Dongda St, Dunhuang	(937) 8822415	(937) 8822309
Jiayuguan	Changcheng Hotel	***	6 Jianshe Rd W, Jiayuguan	(937) 6626306	(937) 6226016
Jinchang	Dragon Hotel	***	Jinchuan Rd, Jinchang	(935) 8811963	(935) 8213158

Flights to and from **Yinchuan**

Route	Days	Dep.	Arr.	Flight
Beijing — Yinchuan	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1015	1205	WH2122
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1520	1725	WH2156
	3 5	1810	2000	WH2103
Yinchuan — Beijing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0755	0935	WH2121
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1255	1440	WH2155
	3 5	2100	2240	WH2104
Changsha — Yinchuan	1 3 5	1830	2140	2Z 328
Yinchuan — Changsha	1 3 5	1450	1755	2Z 327
Chengdu — Yinchuan	1 3 5 7	1045	1410	2Z 408
Yinchuan — Chengdu	1 3 5 7	0800	1005	2Z 407
Dalian — Yinchuan	1 5	1735	2010	2Z 604
Yinchuan — Dalian	1 5	1350	1640	2Z 603
Fuzhou — Yinchuan	1 2 4 6	1215	1630	2Z 562
Yinchuan — Fuzhou	1 2 4 6	0820	1135	2Z 561
Guangzhou — Yinchuan	1 3 5 7	1720	2130	WH2370
Yinchuan — Guangzhou	1 3 5 7	1245	1640	WH2369
Guiyang — Yinchuan	2 4 6	1805	2100	2Z 414
Yinchuan — Guiyang	2 4 6	1500	1720	2Z 413
Hangzhou — Yinchuan	3 6	0950	1250	MF8215
	1 3 5 7	1755	2120	2Z 558

Route	Days	Dep.	Arr.	Flight
Yinchuan — Hangzhou	3 6	1330	1630	MF8216
	1 3 5 7	1350	1710	2Z 557
Qingdao — Yinchuan	2 7	0800	1000	SC 221
	1 3 6	0800	1245	SC 283
	2 6	1240	1510	2Z 520
Yinchuan — Qingdao	2 6	0830	1200	2Z 519
	1 3 6	1325	1700	SC 284
	2 7	1340	1530	SC 222
Shanghai — Yinchuan	1 3 5 7	0845	1235	FM 203
	2 4 6	1710	2110	WH2524
Yinchuan — Shanghai	2 4 6	1245	1620	WH2523
	1 3 5 7	1320	1655	FM 204
Ürümqi — Yinchuan	1 5	1600	1845	CJ6464
	2 5	1750	2010	MU5958
Yinchuan — Ürümqi	1 5	1210	1515	CJ6463
	2 5	1440	1710	MU5957
Zhengzhou — Yinchuan	1 3 6	0955	1245	SC 283
	1 3 5 7	1950	2120	2Z 558
Yinchuan — Zhengzhou	1 3 6	1325	1515	SC 284
	1 3 5 7	1350	1525	2Z 557

Flights to and from **Lanzhou**

Route	Days	Dep.	Arr.	Flight
Beijing — Lanzhou	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1125	1335	WH2112
	1 4 6	1450	1700	WH2120
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1710	1920	WH2116
	2 4 5 6	2030	2235	WH2118
Lanzhou — Beijing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0835	1035	WH2111
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1420	1620	WH2115
	2 4 5 6	1740	1940	WH2117
	3 5 7	2000	2200	WH2119
Changchun — Lanzhou	4 7	0900	1340	CJ6445
	3 6	1000	1430	CJ6445
Lanzhou — Changchun	4 7	1435	1920	CJ6446
	3 6	1530	2030	CJ6446
Chengdu — Lanzhou	2 4	0755	0915	SZ4901
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	2010	2130	WH2432
	3 5	2045	2210	WH2416
	1 2 4 6 7	2050	2210	WH2416
Lanzhou — Chengdu	3 5	1440	1545	WH2415
	1 2 4 6 7	1440	1600	WH2415
	2 4	1625	1745	SZ4902
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1820	1930	WH2431
Guangzhou — Lanzhou	1 4	0855	1300	CZ3207
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1210	1515	WH2312

Route	Days	Dep.	Arr.	Flight
Lanzhou — Guangzhou	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0825	1115	WH2311
	1 4	1350	1730	CZ3208
Jinan — Lanzhou	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	0800	1010	SC 369
	3 6	1235	1430	CJ6445
	4 7	1635	1840	CJ6437
Lanzhou — Jinan	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1050	1250	SC 370
	3 6	1530	1755	CJ6446
	4 7	1920	2120	CJ6438
Kunming — Lanzhou	1 4	1005	1200	3Q4961
	1 2 4 6 7	1845	2210	WH2416
	3 5	1850	2210	WH2416
Lanzhou — Kunming	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1440	1750	WH2415
	1 4	1850	2040	3Q4962
Sanya — Lanzhou	3 7	0820	1440	CJ6737
Lanzhou — Sanya	3 7	1520	2130	CJ6738
Yinchuan — Lanzhou	1 4 6	1010	1110	8C 701
	2 7	1040	1130	SC 221
	2 4 6	1320	1410	CJ6453
Lanzhou — Yinchuan	2 7	1210	1300	SC 222
	1 4 6	1210	1310	8C 702
	2 4 6	1500	1550	CJ6454

* For reference only.

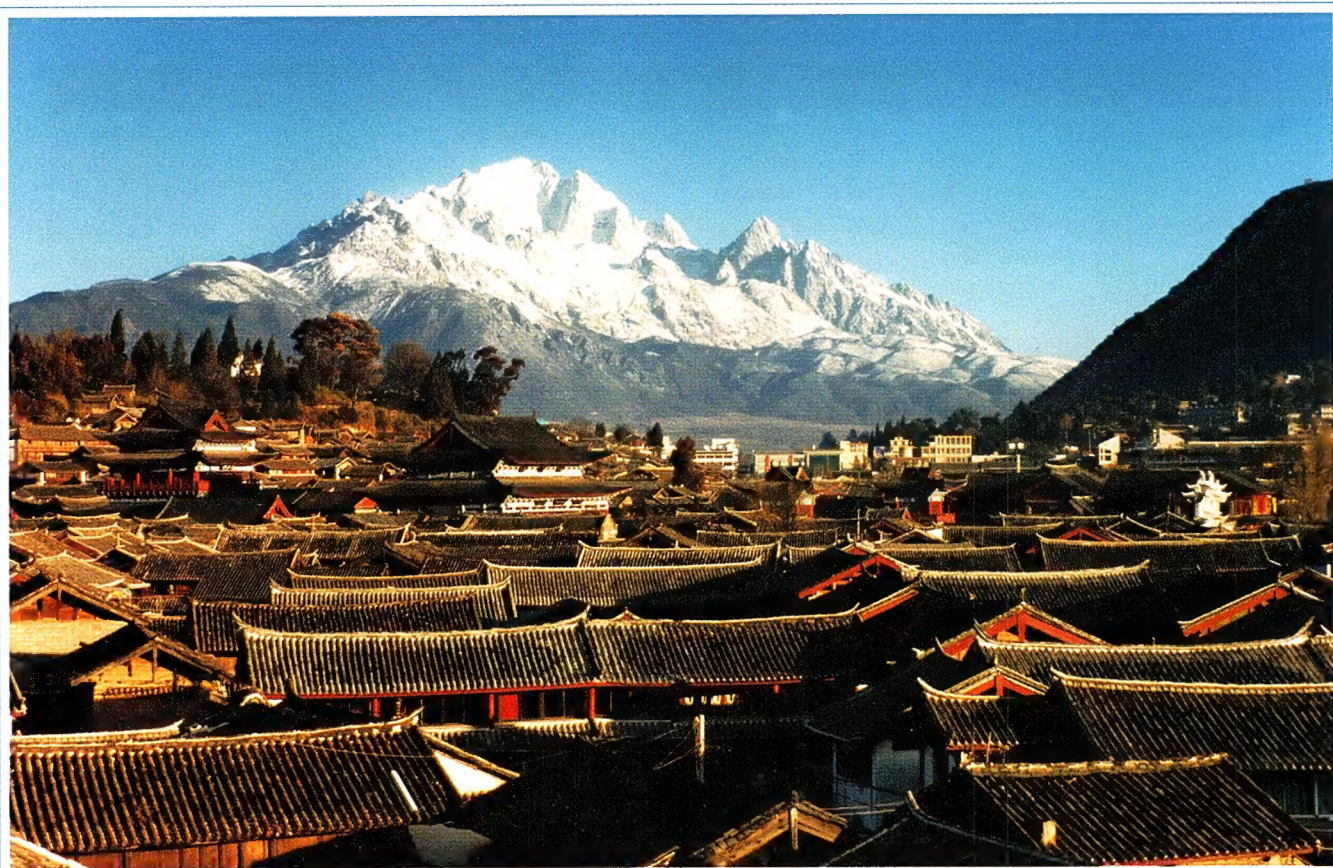
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CZ= China Southern Airlines
SC= Shandong Airlines
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FM= Shanghai Airlines
SZ= China Southwest Airlines
8C= Shanxi Airlines

MF= Xiamen Airlines Co Ltd
WH= China Northwest Airlines



- With its well-preserved architecture, the **Lijiang ancient city** was inscribed on the World Heritage Site list by UNESCO in 1997. The most famous part of Lijiang, Dayan Town got its name from its inkstone-like topography, as mountains and waters surround the town on all four sides. It features uniquely-styled folk houses and is crisscrossed by crystal-clear streams. More and more Westerners visit Lijiang and some have even settled in the ancient city in recent years. In the Feature Story, our correspondents introduce five ways to appreciate the beauty of Lijiang, by way of photography, hiking, cultural study, retrospection, and music.
- **Sexu Monastery**, a grand Tibetan monastery located in Shiqu County in the Ganzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in northwestern Sichuan Province, is an important venue of a Buddhism ceremony every April. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, from Sichuan, Qinghai Province, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, flock to the place, to receive

empowerment given by the Living Buddha and other Buddhism masters. The ceremony continues for up to seven days. But what seems to amaze our city-dwelling correspondent most is the obedience of the Tibetans and how they have no need of queues. Don't miss the heart-rending scenes in the next Customs.

- The longest river in Asia, the Yangtse is regarded as the "mother of rivers" in China. However, most people living around it are unaware of **the origin of the Yangtse**. In the forthcoming Nature segment, the author reflects upon his love and concern for the river. For 15 years, he made constant explorative investigations in areas around the Yangtse. He helped set up a protective station, a memorial tablet, a gallery and more in a concerted effort to arouse awareness about preserving natural resources and the ecosystem of the mother river. Along with appreciating his great achievements, it is high time for all of us to carry on his mission from generation to generation.

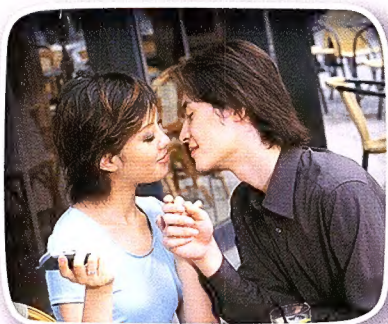


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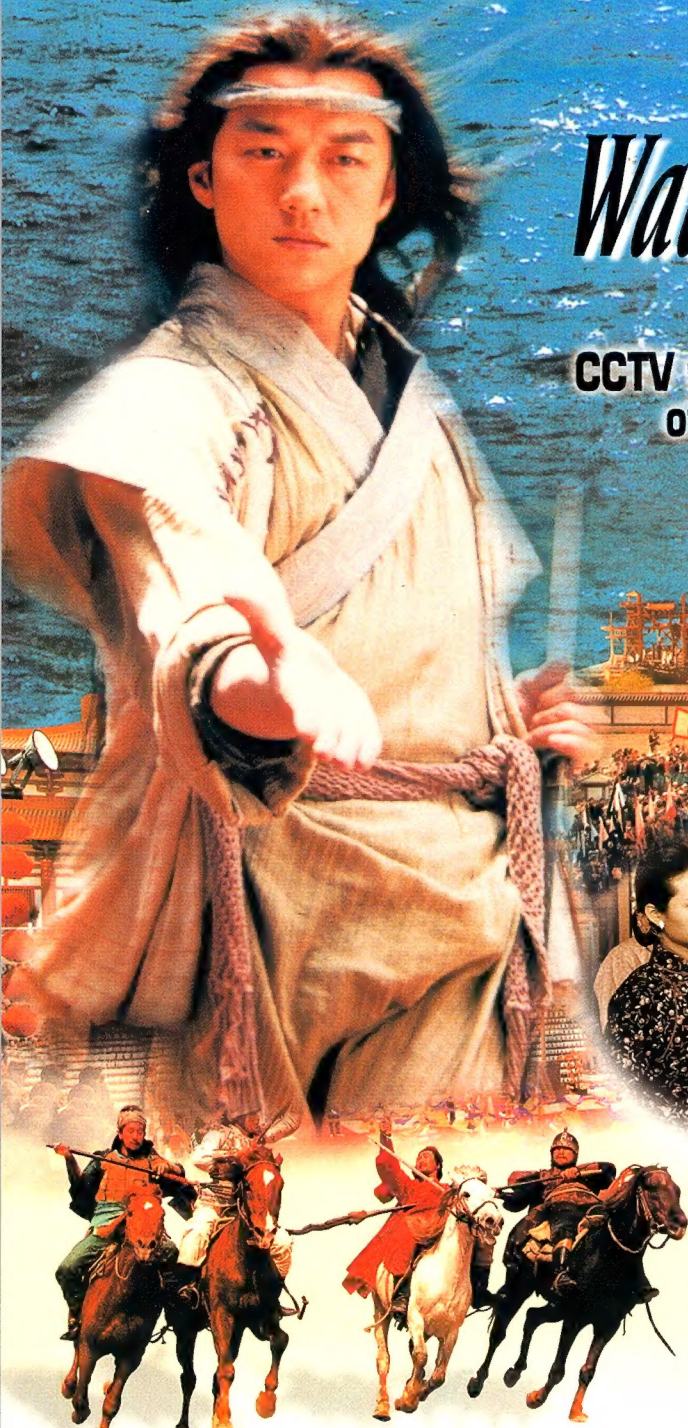
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